

**INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT AND THE
DYNAMICS OF GENERAL ELECTIONS IN BORNO STATE,
NORTH EAST, NIGERIA**

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Abstract

The right to vote and be voted for as a democratic principle is enshrined in the Nigerian constitution. Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) as citizens have the right to enjoy these fundamental rights. The electoral Acts of Nigeria stipulates that all citizens must register in a polling unit designated as voting center. In 2013 in Borno state, over 3 million citizens as voters were forced to flee their registered polling units due to the activities of Boko Haram Insurgency. The Federal Government due to pressure from the civil society moved the polling units to the capital city, Maiduguri where the IDPs were camped. The Borno State Government provided logistics to ensure that these IDPs were relocated to the camps from across the country in order to participate in the 2015 elections. The IDPs were a tool used to change the dynamics of 2015 general elections. This study is of the opinion that the outcome of the elections in 2015 and 2019 with block votes for the APC in the state described the failure of the Goodluck's Administration which was largely believed not to have protected the IDPs from the insurgents, and still voted massively for President Muhammadu Buhari in 2019, despite the continued onslaught by the insurgency. The study therefore concludes that, IDPs were used as a force by the APC to vote the People's Democratic Party out of Power in 2015 and consolidate their stay in 2019.

Keywords: IDPs, Influence, Party, Power, Right, Voters

Introduction

There is today, a universal expression of preference for democracy as a form of government that is people-driven. Like every human construction, democracy aims at widening the frontiers of liberty and equality. Democracy nourishes the people and give them hope by given them the opportunity to determine their own destiny through elections. Nigeria, since independence have experience different type of government ranging from democracy to authoritarianism. Election is very central to the principles and practice of democracy all over the world. Since the birth of the modern state, and the major advance made in terms of the popular will as the source of sovereignty, election has offered a way through which the people exercise their right to choose their rulers. Election has been defined as one procedure of aggregating preferences of a particular kind (The International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences). The bottom line of elections is that it offers choice to the electorates who can choose between two or several alternatives. Related to this, election confers legitimacy on those elected, because this mode of political recruitment reflects the wishes and aspirations of the people. Furthermore, election promotes accountability, in the sense that fear of defeat at the polls exerts pressure on those in power to

conduct themselves in a responsible manner and to take account of popular interests and wishes in their decisions.

The plight of displaced persons has in recent years become a formidable problem of global significance and implications. The total number of displaced persons is currently estimated around fifty million worldwide, with the majority of these people in Africa and Asia. Displacement across the country is a common result of both communal violence and internal armed conflicts. While some of the conflicts appear to be caused by religious or ethnic differences, benefits of a political, social and economic nature are generally behind the violence in the country with endemic poverty, low levels of education and a huge and alienated youth population. Nigeria regularly experiences displacement as a consequence of natural disasters such as flooding or soil erosion for example about 180, 000 are displaced by natural disaster in south east. Nigeria has been affected by recurrent internal conflicts and generalized violence since the end of military rule and the return of democracy in 1999. Democracy is a form of government that allows its citizens to determine their own destiny. IDPs are people who have been displaced from their homes of habitual residence. Since they are citizens they still have the rights to participate in the electoral process that democratic practices provides either as candidates for elective positions or as an electorate.

As citizens of the same country in which they are displaced, the IDPs will have to turn for help from their own governments and authorities, which bear the primary responsibility for protecting and assisting them. In most contexts where IDPs live, the local or national governments are not in a position to undertake the responsibility due to limited capacities and financial resources. They also lack protection by the constitutional guarantees or relevant domestic legislation. IDPs have the right to benefit from equality without discrimination, the same rights and freedoms under international and national law as do other persons in their country. States have a responsibility to ensure the full and equal entitlement of human rights of all individuals on their territory or under their jurisdiction. This responsibility of the State extends to all apparatus of the State. The responsibilities of the State to respect, protect and fulfil human rights apply at all times, including during armed conflict and disasters.

Nigeria has one of the highest numbers of displaced persons in Africa in 2016 and accounts for about 15 million internally displaced by conflict and generalised violence (Bilak et al, 2016). This does not include internal displacement induced by development projects that are regulated by states. Between July and October 2012, National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) (2013) estimates that a total of 7.7 million people were affected by inter-communal conflicts and flooding across the federation. Out of the affected population, 2.1 million people were internally displaced (IDPs) as a result of terrorist activities. Boko Haram terrorist group has been killing people and destroying homes, leading to the influx of millions of internally-displaced persons who have turned Maiduguri into a safe haven. There are over 1.5 million IDPs that are displaced from about 18 local government areas of Borno state who were forced to leave the comfort of their homes to take refuge in the state capital as IDPs. NEMA (2013) reports that Boko Haram terrorists had forced residents of various communities in Borno state to take refuge in Maiduguri, Adamawa, Bauchi, Gombe, Taraba, Yobe and Abuja but as at July 2016, about 1.5 million IDPs are being camped in various public school premises, newly-completed but yet-to-be-commissioned housing estates, as well as among host communities in Maiduguri, Borno state (Ifatimehin, 2019).

This IDPs participated in the 2015 and 2019 general elections not from the location they registered as their pooling units as required by the electoral Acts. The electoral acts provided that individuals will only participate in the election from the point of registration. The peculiarity of the situation of the IDPs and the security situation as well pressures from the civil society forced the government to enfranchise the IDPs by moving their pooling units to the IDP camps in Maiduguri. This paper therefore examines the dynamism of Internal Displacement in the General Elections in Borno State, North East, Nigeria. The

study utilized the documentary method for data generation, and used content analysis to analyze the data collected.

Conceptual Clarification

Concept of Election

Election is very central to the principles and practice of democracy all over the world. Since the birth of the modern state, and the major advance made in terms of the popular will as the source of sovereignty, election has offered a way through which the people exercise their right to determine their rulers. Election has been defined as one procedure of aggregating preferences of a particular kind. The bottom line of elections is that it offers choice to the electorates who can choose between two or several alternatives. Related to this, election confers legitimacy on those elected, because this mode of political recruitment reflects the wishes and aspirations of the people. Furthermore, election promotes accountability, in the sense that the threat of defeat at the polls exerts pressure on those in power to exercise power in a responsible manner, and to take account of popular interests and wishes in their decisions.

An essential requirement of election in a democracy is that it should be free and fair. Mackenzie (1967) has identified four conditions necessary for free and fair elections: an independent judiciary to interpret the electoral laws; an honest, competent and non-partisan administration to manage the elections; a developed system of political parties, well organized to put their programmes and candidates before the electors as alternatives within which to choose; and a general acceptance throughout the political community, of certain rather vague rules of the game, which limit the struggle for power because of some unspoken sentiment that if the rules of the game are not observed more or less faithfully, the game itself will disappear amidst the wreckage of the whole system.

Although these requirements may represent the ideal, they are nonetheless useful in anticipating the outcome of elections and determining the health of an electoral system. More importantly, they are not far from those identified by Dundas (1994) as conditions and criteria to be met to guarantee transparent, free and fair elections. These include: the need for a level playing field for the various contending political parties; fixed dates for elections; independence of the electoral and boundary commissions; creation of subordinate entities to enhance transparency; and involvement of political parties in election processes. Others are: the role of observers, opinion polls and the media; the openness or otherwise of funding for political parties and their campaigns; the effectiveness of limits on campaign expenditure to contain the impact of money on the democratic process; the proper arrangements for the polls on the ground; transparency at the counting place; and the prompt announcement of results. These checklists of ingredients for the success of elections constitute the bedrock of a democratic polity, and where they are lacking as in Nigeria and many other Third World countries, the consequence is obvious: neither can democracy endure, nor can its practices and culture be routinized.

Internally Displaced Persons

The concept of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) has equally gained currency in the field of social and management sciences. The concept started gaining currency in the 1980's as a result of changing dimension in the conflict in nations. Hitherto, the conflict was inter-states but this period witnessed a change to intra-state conflict. Hence, United Nation Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (1998:1) states that IDPs are "Persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognised state border." United Nations Human Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) describes internally displaced persons (IDPs) as probably the largest group of vulnerable people in the world (UN, Guiding Principle, 1998). This definition although universally accepted fails to recognised those who were displaced by the perceived feelings to threat. According to the UNHCR (2007), it has an interest in the protection and welfare of

persons who have been displaced by persecution, situations of generalized violence, conflict or massive violations of human rights: in other words, all those, who had they crossed an international frontier, would have had a claim to international protection. Notably, this description does not include IDPs displaced as a result of natural disasters or development activities. Nonetheless, the subsequent 'overriding' consensus is that these persons are also worthy of attention since they can also be subject to discrimination and human rights violations in the course of their displacement.

The definition of IDPs provided above is the most widely used definition. Geoffroy (2007), posits that this definition has two main elements; the coercive or otherwise involuntary character of movement; and, the fact that such movement takes place within a national border. Geoffroy (2007) argues that in spite of all the studies and research done to reach satisfying definitions, there is often no neat and clear distinction between forced and economic migration when it comes to a protracted crises, asset depletion often comes before displacement and it becomes hard to tell who is to be considered as a direct victim of the conflict and who is to be considered as an indirect victim.

In contrast to the definition given by United Nation Guiding Principle on Internal Displacement, Ibeanu (1998) argues in opposition to traditional explanations that population displacement is a complex problem most often arising when the rights of a group are violated or denied; or when the physical security of members of the group is threatened. The nature of the state is a major causal factor inducing population displacement, especially where is unable to ensure access for all its citizens or accord them adequate physical security. In his reconceptualisation of IDPs, Ibeanu (1998), conceives it as "internal population displacement" as an integral part of a single general theory of population displacement. Internal should not be understood as defining a category of displaced persons as in IDPs (internal) distinct from refugees (external). Neither should it be understood as a formulation of a regional theory of internal population displacement. Rather, it should represent an attempt to build into a general theory population displacement the purely secondary parameter of the exact location of a displaced population. This conceptualisation points to the fact that locations determine access to assistance.

IDPs are people forced to flee their homes but whom, unlike refugees, remain within their country's borders. Refugees and IDPs share many characteristics; however, those who are displaced within their own borders are not covered by international refugee law and are, therefore, particularly difficult to protect or to provide them with humanitarian assistance (Daudu, 2005: 1).

The point made by both Ibeanu (1998) and Daudu (2005) is that human services are given to the displaced as a result of their location, and international law only covers those living outside the domain of their states of initial displacement. The analysis shows the weakness of international law on IDPs; however there exist concerted effort by the international actors to protect the rights of IDPs in the form of the enactment of guiding principles and its domestication by states.

Party Identification Theory

This theory is based on the assumption that the electorate tend to vote on party alliance rather than group interest. The earliest theory of voting behaviour, the party identification model, is based on the sense of psychological attachment that people have to parties. The electorate is seen as people who identify with a party, in the sense of being long term supporters who regard the party as 'their' party. Voting is therefore a manifestation of partisanship, not a calculation influenced by factors such as policies, personalities, socializations, seeing the family as the principal means through which political loyalties are forged. These are then, in most cases, reinforced by group membership and later social experiences.

In this model, attitudes towards policies and leaders, as well as perceptions about group and personal interest, tend to be developed on the basis of party identification. Events are thus interpreted to fit with pre-existing loyalties and attachments. This partisan alignment tends to create stability and continuity,

especially in terms of habitual patterns of voting behaviours, often sustained over a lifetime. From this point of view it is possible to calculate the 'normal' vote of a party by reference to partisanship levels. Deviations from this 'normal' level presumably reflect the impact of short-term factors.

The 2015 and 2019 General Elections and the Dynamics of Internal Displacement

All efforts were made to ensure that IDPs voted for the 2015 and 2019 general elections. Some of the IDPs found shelter in temporary camps provided by the government and other humanitarian agencies. These camps were/ are located mainly in these areas, thereby making the IDPs in such areas easily located and accessible for planning and policy making. The Independent National Electoral Commission (2015) pointed out that at least 70,000 persons that were internally displaced by Boko Haram terrorists from their communities cast their votes in camps located within Maiduguri, the Borno state capital. At least 16 of 27 local government areas in the state were sacked by Boko Haram terrorists who forced residents to flee. At the point of preparation for the 2015 general elections in Borno State it was strategized that most of the IDPs who did not register in camps, but chose to stay with their relatives would also vote at designated voting centres allocated for their local government areas. There were a total number of 1,838,514 registered voters in Borno state out of which 1,763,860 had received their PVCs, out of which 1,417,450 have been distributed, and over 18,000 PVCs had not been delivered to the state yet. Out of the registered voters, a total of 70,485 persons voted in the camps as IDPs that were displaced from 16 local government areas of Borno state.

There were several modalities according to Nwokedi and Iloh (2017) that were adopted by INEC to ensure that IDPs were not disenfranchised as a result of displacement. These modalities include change in residency requirement for IDPs; mass transfers of the registration of identified IDPs to their new locations; creation of special voting centres for IDPs in the north east; and distribution of outstanding PVCs to IDPs in their camps before the election.

There is no doubt that the change in residency requirement adopted by INEC in the 2015 general elections made it possible for IDPs in Borno State to vote in the first place. Section 58 of the Electoral Act 2010 (as amended) provides that no person shall be permitted to vote at any polling unit other than the one to which he/ she is allotted. However, as part of the modalities to ensure they voted, this requirement was waived for the IDPs. The opposition party insisted that this must happen despite and do everything possible to convey IDPs who are domiciled outside of the State to ensure they participated in the election. It is of interest to the parties knowing that they would vote for the candidate from the north. There was growing dissatisfaction with the ruling party as that then and the opposition capitalized on it to ensure that they had victory (Nwokedi & Iloh, 2017).

It was also on record that despite the requirement of the law which was pushed away and ensures that IDPs in Borno State participated in the process there was transfers of the registration of identified IDPs to their new locations. This was done to ensure that IDPs voted in the 2015 general elections. Section 13 (1) (2) of the Electoral Act 2010 (as amended) provides the processes of transfer of registration thus:

A person who before the election is resident in a constituency other than the one in which he was registered may apply to the Resident Electoral Commissioner of the State where he is currently resident for his name to be entered on the transferred voters' list for the constituency... An application under Subsection (1) of this Section shall be accompanied by the applicant's voter's card and shall be made not less than 30 days before the date of an election in the constituency where the applicant is resident.

Also Section 58 stipulates that no person shall be permitted to vote at any polling unit other than the one to which he is allotted. However, there was no recorded evidence that IDPs in Borno State adhered to this provision before they were allowed to vote, which suggested that INEC overlooked this very important provision of the Electoral Act. In other words, this provision was waived to enable them vote. When a comparison is made of other IDPs in Nigeria could not benefit from this waiver. More

importantly, even those who would have leveraged on that provision to transfer their registration in order to vote could not do so as INEC had earlier announced that the time for the elections was too close, and as a result there would be no time to process any application for transfer of registration as it was then encumbered with the distribution of PVCs (Nweje, 2015). Therefore, this modality, because it enfranchised IDPs in Borno State, and disenfranchised others from the other parts of the country, was meant to give undue advantage to the opposition candidate.

The opposition party in 2015 but now the ruling party in 2019 recorded landslide victory in the general elections in Borno State largely due to the seemingly I don't care attitude put up by the government of Goodluck Jonathan. This mass disaffection was capitalized by the opposition and used to bring down the government. The IDPs voted massively against the ruling party. Moreover, the State has always been an opposition State and massively believed in the candidature of President Mohamadu Buhari. This explains the support President Buhari enjoyed from the IDPs despite the perpetuation of attacks on the State and continues stay of the IDPs in camps despite the promise of 3 months end to the insurrection when the president emerge victorious in 2015.

Conclusions

This study is of the opinion that the outcome of the elections in 2015 and 2019 with block votes for the APC in the state described the failure of the Goodluck's Administration which was largely believed not to have protected the IDPs from the insurgents, and still voted massively for President Muhammadu Buhari in 2019, despite the continued onslaught by the insurgency. The study therefore concludes that, IDPs were used as a force by the APC to vote the People's Democratic Party out of Power in 2015 and consolidate their stay in 2019. Based on the party identification theory as used by the study it was argued that INEC, an institution of the state controlled by the hegemonic group, the Hausa/ Fulani oligarchy, was used during the 2015 general elections to give undue advantage to the opposition candidate by enfranchising IDPs who were likely to vote for him.

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