Post-Election Violence, Thuggery and Internal Displacement in Lagos State: A Critical Evaluation of the 2023 Nigerian General Elections

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Abstract
Major crises associated with the post elections and thuggery in Lagos state constitute one of the nation's most worrisome humanitarian crises. Thugs and 'area boys' are always on rampage before, during and after elections in most parts of the state. With incidences of post-election conflict and violence, the number of the homeless persons and wounded patriots in the state rise intermittently. In addressing these crises in the state, efforts of the government have not yielded a favourable result. This study is therefore interrogating the extent to which these conflicts have contributed to the crisis of the homeless people, as well as the challenges facing them in their various locations throughout the state and the problems which government encounters while dealing with the crises. The study adopted Social Inclusion Theory as theoretical framework while content analysis and other secondary sources of data are used for analysis. Findings of the study reveal that internal displacement occasioned by post-election crises in Lagos state is largely caused by violent conflict by party members and electorates and the inability of the local and state governments in finding lasting solutions to issues of conflicts and violence within the state. The study made recommendations that he promotion of good governance at all levels of governance in the state is germane to the peaceful co-existence of all residents. Also, that the state assembly should enact a legislation which reinforces the state's primary responsibility to protect the rights and the well -being of people forced out of their homes due to conflict, violence, disaster and human rights abuses.

Keywords
Post-election conflict, Violence, Internal Displacement, Internally Displaced Persons and Forced Migration/Force Displacement.

Introduction

The subject of post-election conflict has assumed a phenomenon of national interest. This is gradually making many innocent people lose their lives, property and loved ones (Albert, 2012). The spate of violence usually witnessed after each election in Lagos state is becoming worrisome. Its regular occurrence in recent times and its direct impacts on the socio-cultural, political and financial lives of the affected persons further exposes the state of human insecurity in the state. Anything which reduces the quality of life, which include, conflict, scarcity of vital resources, environmental degradation or demographic pressures, infringes on human security is considered a threat to human security (Dhirathiti, 2011). In its simplest form, issues ranging from poverty, unemployment, conflict, violence, sickness and diseases, to environmental degradation, natural disasters, domestic violence, transnational crimes, and human rights abuses constitute factors which cause insecurity in individuals thereby leading to displacement of these persons from their habitual homes (Betts, et al, 2006).

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One of the most significant humanitarian challenges facing the world in present time is human displacement. As noted by Osagioduwa and Oluwakorede (2016), of the 33.3 million internally displaced persons in the world (exclusive of the development-induced displacement), 15 million internally displaced persons can be found in Africa, with an increase of 7.5% between 2013 and 2014 and Nigeria hosting over 3,300,000 Internally Displaced Persons (IDP's). As the number of internally displaced persons continues to increase, attempt at mitigating this crisis becomes more challenging for trouble countries. While the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement is the only global document on internal displacement, it is not binding despite the fact that Internally Displaced Persons constitute a large number than the refuge population (Olanrewaju, et al 2018). The domestication of the Guiding Principles around the world have not been encouraging, as most developing countries such as Nigeria, generating most of the global displacement figure have not domesticated the document (Olanrewaju, et al 2018).

Notably also, global efforts at managing displacement have concentrated more on refugees than internally displaced persons, yet the internally displaced person's crisis equally constitutes a challenge to global civilization (Osagioduwa and Oluwakorede, 2016).

Meanwhile, post-election conflict and violent conflict take the largest percentage of all factors causing homelessness and loss of property in Lagos state. Violent conflicts, whether social, political or environmental have contributed significantly to the crisis situation in terms of loss of human and material capital as well as the diversion of leaders' efforts away from primary issues in sustainable human development, and have contributed in no small measure to state of underdevelopment in Nigeria. Each of the conflicts leads to wanton loss of lives and property as well as human displacement (Nnoli, cited in, Albert, 2012.). Conflicts destroy and disrupt families and community life. They particularly undermine family systems through deliberate targeting of women and the recruitment of children to join ranks of fighters and /or extremist cartels. The loss of livelihoods, due in part to the destruction of infrastructure and natural resources, and lack of employment opportunities coincides with a weakened social safety net and a decline in the capacity of the state to provide services such as, health and education. The experience since 1999 shows that post-elections conflicts in the state impact negatively on the rule of law, state capacity and democratic processes. Experiencing electoral conflict can be extremely traumatic. Many people from communities experiencing violent conflict suffer from post-traumatic stress syndrome, which contributes to post-mental and physical health, reduced quality of life, and in some cases, greater difficulties in work, education and family life (and increased violent behavior) (Albert, 2012).

Therefore, within the context of the above background, this study questions thus; what are the causes of post-election conflicts in Lagos state? What is the nexus between conflicts and internal displacement in Lagos state? What are the challenges facing the affected persons? and, how effective are the governmental efforts to solve the problems over the years? Meanwhile, the general elections of the 2023 are significant because there were a handful of violent conflicts during these elections in the state as well as the increase in the tenacity of the incidence of hooliganism by 'area boys' before, during and after the elections in the state.

Conceptual Analysis

It is pertinent however to consider the meanings of some key concepts and terms which are inherent in this study. These are: post-election violence, conflict, internal displacement/internal displaced person (IDP's) and forced migration.

Post-election violence

Violence has been viewed from different perspectives and distinctive standpoints by scholars. Mackenzie, sees violence as, "the exercise of physical force so as to inflict injury on or cause damage to persons or property; (as an) action or conduct characterized by this, and treatment or usage tending to cause bodily injury or forcibly interfering with personal freedom". (Cited in Yaqub, 2011: 203).

In this study, however, post-election violence is taken as violation of human rights and social justice after an election. Homelessness of people in Nigeria is put into consideration as different kinds of violence leads to forced displacement in the first place. Between 2005 and 2018, Nigeria has recorded several cases of ethno-religious, inter-ethnic, political and intra and inter-communal violent conflicts (Adesole and Peters, 2015). They define violence as 'destructive aggression'. This conceptualization of violence as applied in this study, implies the use of physical force to injure persons or property; and this is the core definition of violence. Supporting this definition, the World Health Organization defined violence as the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood to resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation (WHO, 2002).

Homelessness/Internally Displaced Persons

The concept of internally displaced persons has become highly disputed and as such, there is no internationally agreed definition of who is an internally displayed person (Akuto, 2017). In this study internal displacement will be used synonymously as 'homelessness' and forced displacement. These terms are closely related in meanings and explanations. However, an attempt at a working definition in 1992 by the United Nations Secretary-General defines internally displaced persons as "persons or groups who have been forced to flee their homes suddenly or unexpectedly in large numbers as a result of armed conflict, internal strife, systematic violations of human rights or natural or man-made disaster, and who are within the territory of their own country (United Nations Commission or Human Rights 1992: Paragraph 17). In an attempt to fill the gaps and omission in the above definition, the United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displaced Persons, defines IDP's as '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 conflicts, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border (UNCHR, Guiding Principles on IDP's, 2005).

The distinctive feature of homelessness and internal displacement given in the above two definitions is coerced or involuntary movement that takes place within national borders. The reasons for this movement though may vary, include armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights and natural or human made disasters. Although the idea of displacement caused by developmental activities have not been included in the working definitions which was reflected in the 1998 Guiding principles of the UN, which is at international level, at the regional level, some states have adopted the UN Guiding principles definition and have included many developmental activities as one of the causes of internal displacement(s) in the regions. Regions such as South Asia and West Africa governments have included displacement from developmental projects as one of the causes of internal displacements in their regions (Ejifor et al, 2016). As a result of the negligence of persons displaced by developmental projects, these persons receive less support from their governments and even less of international aids as compared to persons displaced by conflicts and violence (Ibid).

Forced Migration

Forced migration or involuntary migration used in this study, refers to the coerced movement of persons away from their home or home region. It connotes violent coercion, and is used interchangeably with the

term 'displacement' or forced displacement (Adesote and Peters, 2015). Someone who has experienced forced migration is a 'forced migrant' or 'displaced person'. The international organization for migration defines forced migration as any person who migrates to "escape persecution, conflict, repression, natural and human-made disasters, ecological degradation, or other situations that endanger their lives, freedom or livelihood.

Conflict

In its simple sense, the word "conflict" means "clash of opinion, interest, values or views". In the literature of strategic studies, conflict assumes a higher intellectual character among contending scholars. Thus, while Coser conceptualizes conflicts as "a struggle over and claims to scarce resources in which the aims of opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals" (Cited in Olorunfemi, 2009:148). He also defines it as "a condition in which one identifiable groups of human beings is engaged in conscious opposition to one or more other identifiable groups because these groups are pursuing what are or appear to be incompatible goals". Conflict is a natural occurrence between human beings at the individual or group level. Nwolise (2004: 1) notes that "Conflict need not necessarily be violent", unless where there is irritating intransigence or lack of cooperation. Whenever conflict becomes violent, it becomes dreadful, as it turns into war which in the words of Clausewitz (1968) is "a duel on extensive scale", or an act of violence pushed its utmost bounds directed upon the destruction of the enemy's power".

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the Social Inclusion Theory. The relevance of this theory is situated in its concerns and ability to investigate the needs of people whose situation demands for special attention after a trauma of violent attack in the post-election exercise in Lagos state.

Social Inclusion Theory

The Social Inclusion theory is concerned with group of people who need assistance due to their prevailing situation. The theory is easily associated with 'Social Exclusion' as a theory and is traced to the French notion of *les exclus* in 1970 with the authorship of the expression credited to René Lenoir (Robo, 2014). This theory postulates that in a socially inclusive society, everyone is valued and their basic needs are supplied to them. This in turn leads to a sense of belonging amongst the people. However, there are some values that form the basis of the social inclusion theory such as: everyone needs support, can learn, can contribute, can communicate, is ready and together we are better (Robo, 2014). Social inclusion is a result of the action taken positively to change the circumstances of these people. In a lighter form, social inclusion is the opposite effect to the social exclusion theory (Charity Commission, 2001). This theory is best understood when explaining social exclusion theory as both theories are 'the inseparable side of the same coin' (Robo, 2014). The Social Inclusive theory is apt for the purpose of this study as it supports the integration of the internally displaced persons into the larger society. In Nigeria, if the internally displaced persons are well integrated into the society, this alignment would allow for better management of the crisis and enhanced security of persons in the country. This in turn would enhance human security.

Post-Election Conflict, Thuggery and Internal Displacement in Lagos State.

The intimidation, threats, and harassment of non-indigenes after the February 25 presidential/National Assembly elections in Lagos State speak to the primitive nature of politics in Nigeria. There were reports of physical attacks, threats to evict non-natives from the state, and denial of access to social services because the presidential candidate of the All Progressives Congress, who is from Lagos, lost the state to Peter Obi, the Labour Party candidate from Anambra State in the South-East. The security agencies and leaders of thought in Lagos and throughout the South-West should defuse this incendiary trend with urgency.

This tendency does not represent the character, agenda, or cosmopolitan outlook of the indigenous people of South-West Nigeria. The thugs, violent transport union enforcers, motor park touts and petty criminals assaulting others should be promptly disowned. Most of them are not even Lagos State indigenes. It is important that the political leadership of Lagos and the Yoruba pressure groups immediately speak out, dissociate themselves from the perpetrators and take proactive actions to discourage further harassment of innocent persons. Every Nigerian has the right to reside and exercise all fundamental freedoms in any part of the country without fear of molestation. This cannot be abridged by any one.

Tensions soared shortly after the balloting, but degenerated on Monday, 27ᵗʰ February, 2023 when the Independent National Electoral Commission declared Obi the winner in Lagos. Incensed at the defeat of their candidate, some APC supporters began to harass non-Yoruba residents and their property. This is unwarranted, a gross violation of the fundamental rights of their victims.

There were reports of attacks at markets dominated by the Igbo traders in Lagos Island, Alaba, Ilasamaja, Computer Village in Ikeja, and Ikotun. Traders hurriedly closed their shops in panic. The Ladipo spare parts market was shut down for two days.

Some have been displaced and sent packing from their rented apartments by their landlords who are of the state origin. Cases of some traders who were not allowed to sell their markets in Ojo and Alaba markets of Lagos were also reported. Though, all these acts were linked to the boys who could not be claimed to be members of the APC or belonging to political clan of the leaders of politics in the state.

This is bad politics perpetrated by miscreants that have become accustomed to hiring themselves out as thugs to politicians. INEC said Obi polled 582,664 votes in Lagos, while the APC candidate (now President-elect), Bola Tinubu, scored 541,850. Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party came in a distant third with 75,750 votes.

Lagos is Nigeria's sole megacity with 14 of its 20 local government areas constituting the urban conurbation. Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu, and Tinubu, on whose behalf the barbarians claim to be acting, have taken stronger stands than their separately issued disclaimers and appealed for calm. They should ensure that their violent supporters do not tarnish the cosmopolitan essence of the state.

Traders should also be responsible; some of them violated an agreement to shut all markets at a time given the tension generated by the elections, prompting the thugs, unsolicited, to move in to enforce the order. It was not their responsibility to do so; the police should therefore take all necessary measures to nip the nonsense in the bud.

Some areas in Alimosho, Oshodi-Isolo, Ojo, Amuwo-odofin and some other areas believed to be the strongholds of the opposition parties were under severe attack by the hoodlums before, during and after the elections.

On the other hands, the APC and its members were also attacked during campaign exercises in the state. Banners, bill-boards, posters, sign-posts etc belonging to the party were destroyed in various locations in the state. Cases of such acts were reported in Ikorodu, Lagos Island, Ebute-Metta and others. Some members of the party were also reported beaten by the opposition party members.

The Challenges of Affected Persons of Post-Election Conflicts in Lagos State.

The challenges of post-election conflicts in Lagos state have tremendous negative impacts on traders, strangers, youths and the elderly ones and are inimical to development. The opposition parties such as the PDP and LP have also had their fair shares of harassment. Both the LP and PDP accused the Lagos

State Signage and Advertisement Agency of sabotaging their outdoor publicity campaigns. The governorship candidate of the PDP, Abdulazeez Adediran, along with his team, was reportedly attacked at the Ikoga junction of Badagry LGA during a campaign tour in October, 2022.

*During the 2015 election cycle, the Oba of Lagos, Rilwan Akiolu, in a fit of indiscretion, warned non-indigenes not to vote against the then Governor, Akinwumi Ambode, or they would "be thrown into the lagoon." Some other traditional rulers have this time been accused of similarly threatening non-indigenes. They are violating the fundamental rights guaranteed by the 1999 Constitution and should be stopped (*The Punch, 28th February, 2023*).*

The traditional rulers plunging into politics should be reined in, cautioned on the need to be politically neutral and on the consequences of misusing their positions to cause communal disharmony, peddle hate speech, or promote electoral violence.

Undoubtedly, this barbaric behaviour does not reflect the values of the Yoruba people. It is not in their character of liberalism and 'open arms' accommodation of other persons and faiths. The Yoruba accede to the supremacy of the valid arguments and established diplomatic performatives that help to entrench harmony over acrimony.

*Its urbane, accommodating nature enabled the nationalist icon, the late Nnamdi Azikiwe, to build his political base and business empire in Lagos. His party won some pre-independence and post-colonial era elections in Lagos without molestation. Mbonu Ojike, born in present day Imo State, was the Deputy Mayor of Lagos in 1951. Many others from around the country and beyond built businesses and political careers in Lagos unmolested. A few misguided ruffians should not be allowed to derail the legacy. The entire world condemned the slaughter of over 1,000 persons in post-election violence in the North in 2011; such intolerance is alien to the cosmopolitan South-West. Amnesty International, the International Crisis Group, and Nextier SPD, had in 2022 predicted violence in Lagos, fearing that it would lead to voter apathy. (*The Punch, 28th February, 2023).*

The security agencies should nip hate speeches, insults, caricatures, and innuendoes that may instigate any person or group to violence. They must activate a sustained and well-coordinated approach to protecting the lives and well-being of voters in the next election.

They are victims of various kinds of injustices or violent confrontations perpetrated against them either by (their own) governments or by others, such as communal clashes, terrorism, riots, religious conflict, ethnic clashes, etc.

In a study carried out by Olanrewaju et al (2018), some of the salient challenges faced by homeless persons across the state are identified as: lack of adequate care; lack of freedom; financial problem; family disintegration; and poor education. Health security has been distorted with the continuous ride of sicknesses and diseases in various camps. Improper or lack of waste management and poor sanitation management could further deteriorate the health security situations in some of their camps.

National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and its Lagos state counterpart which are saddled with handling emergency situations in the country seem to be structurally and financially ill-equipped to deal with such magnitude of crisis situation in Nigeria. They have not been well funded which in turn has impacted her service delivery.

Also, ineffective legislative oversight and delays in the passage of bills relating to IDP's have been identified among other challenges encountered in tackling IDP's crisis in Nigeria. Meanwhile, the absence of strong central regulatory or coordinating agencies and lack of approved policy regulatory framework for IDP's contributes in no small measure to the neglect, lack of adequate care and delays in government's intervention which IDP's suffer in their various camps across Nigeria. Furthermore, there is an absence of long-term goals such as re-integrating the displaced persons. Hence, short-term goals are adopted for the immediate basis of intervention towards the IDP's.

Conclusion and Recommendations.

The point clearly made in this study is that post-election conflicts, thuggery and internal displacement cost Lagos state government and the residents enormous human and material resources that would have been channeled into pursuing the objectives of sustainable development. The crisis of internally displaced persons exacerbated by violent conflict across the state, poses a great threat to her efforts at enhancing human security. However, a lot more still required to be done to address this crisis in the country. This would involve the integrated efforts of governments at all levels, organisations (governmental and non-governmental) and civil society, to permanently solve or ameliorate the crisis situation which the nation is currently facing.

Government should holistically address issues of conflict within the country through preventive diplomacy. It is much cheaper to prevent violent conflict through dialogue and constructive action than to manage its consequences once it had escalated into violent confrontation. The Nigerian State has a duty to address the cross-cutting issues that generate or contribute to violent conflict. Civil society must also cooperate with the state towards ensuring the state becomes more peaceful for all.

This study however, recommends the promotion of good governance at all levels of governance in the state. This is essential at addressing the problem of various forms of violence which have resulted in the homelessness of innocent lives. These include fighting corruption in all areas of its manifestation within the country; political leaders must be awakened to their constitutional responsibilities; dividends of democracy such as availability of public good; high standard of living; good portable water, constant electricity supply, quality education and provision of infrastructural facilities that can make life worthwhile for citizenry, must be adequately provided.

The state assembly should embark on legislative process that will lead to the domestication of African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa; the treaty which reinforces the state's primary responsibility to protect the rights and well -being of people forced out of their homes due to conflict, violence, disaster and human rights abuse.

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