

# THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN CURBING ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

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**Abstract:** *Electoral violence has been a prominent issue in Nigerian politics since the 1950s. This heinous development has resulted in multiple deaths and massive property losses. It is an issue in national development and has become a culture in Nigeria as every election conducted so far in the history of the country has been marred with violence of various magnitudes. The purpose of this paper was to examine electoral violence, the factors that cause it, and its impact on the Nigerian nation, with a particular emphasis on how religion can help to curb the menace. The paper employed a critico-historical method utilizing data from secondary sources. It is revealed that electoral violence has promoted economic and political instability and underdevelopment in Nigeria, including the abuse of human rights.*

**Keywords:** *Religion, Role, Electoral Violence, Nigeria.*

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## **Introduction**

Nigeria, like other African countries since independence, has been faced with a series of problems, among which is electoral violence. It is an issue in national development and has become a culture in Nigeria as every election conducted so far in the history of the country has been marred with violence of various magnitudes. Mustapha (2006) stated that Nigeria is a religiously heterogeneous nation with principal religions such as Islam, Christianity, and African traditional religion. With over 374 ethnic groups in Nigeria, the identities of the three major groups (Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba) were consolidated in the context of the creation of three (3) regions in 1946, resulting in each majority ethnic group consolidating and constituting a "core" ethno-political group in their respective regions with strong political holds: Hausa-Fulani in the Northern Region, Yoruba in the West, and Igbo in the East (Mustapha, 2003).

Nigeria As viewed by many scholars (Onyeonoro, 1973; Ogundiya, 2009), Nigeria has been plagued with political instability since its independence in 1960, regardless of its transformation from being a colonial state to being an independent state; it retained the character of not being a popular national state that represents the interests of its people. Ibeanu (1997) maintained that Nigeria has suffered coups and countercoups, crises of revenue allocation, state creation, power-sharing, civil war, politics of bitterness and intolerance, marginalization of minority ethnic groups, separatist agitations, struggles for resource control, inter-communal conflicts, incompetent

leadership, corruption, terrorism, as well as insurgency (Ibeanu, 1997). More emphasis will be laid on religious and political violence among the above-mentioned issues in Nigeria. It is unfortunate to say that religion has become an even more defining feature of Nigerian politics.

Many bureaucratic challenges in Nigeria take on sectoral dimensions, influenced by government, scarcity, ignorance, and un-education. Chaos based on sectoral affiliation or policies has significantly resulted in observable and mental injury to many people, thereby perpetuating sectoral schism among Nigerians with varying sectoral affiliations. Therefore, it has become pertinent to identify the variables that engender sectoral chaos in Nigeria since the emergence of democracy in 1999 and to discover how beliefs can forebear synchronization devoid of violence.

Albert (2007) posits that electoral violence has been a major problem in Nigerian politics since the 1950s. This revolting and heinous development has resulted in several deaths and massive losses of private and public property in various parts of the country, resulting in a reduction in the country's economic growth and performance. This has been recorded as the main reason for the present crisis, which leads to underdevelopment in the country. It should ring true to our knowledge that violence is not a one-off event but a continuum in the electoral process. As a result, we can discuss election-day, election-day, and post-election violence. This article is a religious analysis of the connection between electoral violence and sustainable national development in Nigeria as a democratic nation.

Dzurgba (2009) and Familusi (2010) are of the view that religious and electoral violence, as earlier mentioned, has been a catalyst for underdevelopment given the impacts and havoc it has wreaked. Considering the socio-ethical relevance of religion, the application of religious moral values during elections is expected to stem the tide of violence.

### **Concept of Electoral Violence**

Typically, violence is used to influence the result of an election. The sort of violence used may take many different forms, but it is always close to Election Day. Even if the fear of violence does not present itself in the form of visible violence, it might be enough to compel voters to comply. The presidential election in Liberia in 1997 serves as a good illustration. The majority of electoral violence research focuses on violence between candidates in an election. Another sort of electoral violence, according to Mehler (2007), has a different motivation. Many conceptions of electoral violence fail to recognize the significance of gender. According to a rising number of studies, this is a mistake since it ignores key, crucial factors. Sierra Leone's 1996 election took place amid the backdrop of a raging civil conflict. The RUF carried out multiple acts of violence against people in an attempt to delegitimize the election.

Electoral violence, according to Albert (2007), includes any sort of coordinated threats aimed at frightening, hurting, or blackmailing a political stakeholder or opponent before, during, or after an election in order to determine, delay, or influence the political process. Electoral violence, according to

Ogundiya and Baba (2005), includes riots, demonstrations, party conflicts, political assassinations, looting, arson, thuggery, and kidnappings that occur before, during, and after elections. According to Ottuh and Aitufe (2014), kidnapping has been one of the tools used by Nigerian politicians to intimidate their political opponents. Others include threat, verbal intimidation, hate speech, disinformation, physical assault, forced protection, blackmail, property destruction, and assassination.

Fischer (2002) defines electoral violence (conflict) as any random or organized act that seeks to determine, delay, or otherwise influence an electoral process. Igbuzor (2010) defines electoral violence as any act of violence perpetrated in the course of political activities, including pre-, during, and after election periods, and may include any of the following acts: thuggery, use of force to disrupt political meetings or voting at polling stations, or the use of dangerous weapons to intimidate voters and other electoral processes, or to cause bodily harm or injury to any person connected with electoral processes. In Nigeria's fourth republic, the aforementioned definitions are the hallmarks of electoral violence. Before, during, and after elections, there is electoral violence. Within and between political parties, pre-election violence takes physical, psychological, and structural forms. It also reveals itself in some shortcomings in formal election preparation. The procedure of selecting flag bearers for various political parties is not usually free of squabbles.

Electoral violence in Nigeria can be traced back to the First Republic, particularly during the elections of

1964 and 1965. During the tumultuous 1983 general elections, electoral violence reared its ugly head once more. Nigerians were largely apathetic following the fraudulent 1983 elections. When the military intervened on December 31, 1983, to depose President Shehu Shagari, this was unsurprising. The June 12, 1993 election, widely thought to have been won by M.K.O. Abiola, remains Nigeria's most free and fair election. When the military administration nullified the presidential election, many Nigerians' dreams were dashed. Soon after, the country was engulfed in widespread rallies, industrial strike action, and civil disobedience.

Nigerian elections have been marred by a wave of violence. Because the military oversaw the electoral process that gave rise to the Fourth Republic in 1999, there was little violence. Manipulation, rigging, thuggery, and assassination of perceived political opponents marked the 2003 elections. Some Northern leaders, including Adamu Ciroma, Iyorchia Ayu, Lawal Kaita, Bello Kirfi, Yahaya Kwande, and Bashir Yusuf Ibrahim, wrote a letter to the PDP National Chairman prior to the presidential election. The group cautioned that the ruling PDP's inability to adopt the zoning principle would jeopardize Nigeria's stability. Election violence is a type of electoral irregularity. Elections have evolved into investments, and like any other enterprise, individuals invest in hopes of profit. The godfathers regard the entire political system as a vast corporate empire from which they must profit indefinitely. Security officers' biased behaviour, as well as the maiming and death of voters, electoral officials, and security forces, are all examples of violence on Election

Day. Ballot boxes are sometimes taken by political thugs and, on rare occasions, by security officers working for powerful politicians and political parties.

## **Political History and Electoral Violence in Nigeria**

Chronicling the history of electoral violence is comparable to writing the country's political history. The first and second republics were both cut short due to significant bloodshed throughout the country. The situation was particularly dire in the southwest. Electoral violence happens primarily in three phases, according to Olumuyiwa (2017): before, during, and after elections. Within and between political parties, pre-election violence takes physical, psychological, and institutional forms. It also reveals itself in certain shortcomings in formal election preparation. Because each political party is comprised of individuals with disparate interests, the process of selecting flag bearers in various political parties is not always free of squabbles. As a result, eager party members will use all means necessary to earn the party ticket, even violence. Depending on the strength of the political party, winning the primary election may be as good as winning the general election. Inconclusive primaries are not uncommon as a consequence of the frequent occurrence of violence. As a result, it may be inferred that election violence is not only an inter-party issue.

Electoral violence expresses itself at the inter-party level in the form of physical and verbal assaults on political opponents, the closing of opposition party offices, the destruction of posters, the disruption of

demonstrations, and the creation of a "no-go zone" for the opposition. Electoral officials' actions and how security services participate in pre-election disagreements inside and between parties have the potential to lead to violence. All of Nigeria's previous elections have been marred by some type of violence prior to Election Day. It should be noted that several people have died in the country as a result of pre-election violence. As a result, prominent opposition parties have resorted to boycotts multiple times after being beaten, harassed, or intimidated before Election Day. This is a typical occurrence in local government or special elections (Olumuyiwa, 2017).

According to Alber (2007), election-day violence includes political behaviour by security officers as well as the maiming and murdering of voters, electoral officials, and security forces. Ballot boxes are sometimes taken by political thugs and, on rare occasions, by security officers working for powerful politicians and political parties. In Nigeria, several people have died on election days. Following the announcement of election results, post-election violence may take the form of burning private and public property, murder, violent demonstrations, and offensive advertising directed at people who won or lost the election. While most violence is perpetrated by those who have lost, maybe as a result of alleged incidents of manipulation and cheating, victors may also assault losers while celebrating their triumph. One issue that should be emphasized is that political parties are more likely to engage in violence during and after elections. What may cause discord among party members after the election is how positions and jobs will be distributed.



Election violence has been described by several scholars as a kind of electoral misconduct. One cause for election fraud is politics' appeal, which stems from the luxury associated with political positions. As a result, people will go to any length to obtain power. As a result, the voting process is often plagued by violence. There is a viewpoint in Dzurgba's (2003) statement that "politics is food." In this context, "food" refers to the way politicians spend their lives, which distinguishes them from the rest of the population. This way of life is always desired by a large number of individuals. Elections have evolved into businesses, and like any other enterprise, individuals invest in the hopes of profit. Leadership in Nigeria has become a tremendous investment and a life insurance where one needs to participate in many weird things to be secure in perpetuity, Odey (2003) says. Because they have invested so much in politics, godfathers now prevail. According to Obaji, godfathers want political and economic power.

According to Abogunrin (1999), most of the violence is the result of rigging or attempts to rig. The issue of rigging is complicated since every political party accuses the other of it. However, past experience has shown that almost every participant wants to rig the game in some way. As a result, whoever have been outwitted resorts to violence? Because of a controversial comment made by Chief Bola Ige, who claimed he was cheated out by the federal administration led by Alhaji Shehu Shagari, violence erupted in the former Oyo State in 1983. Conducting a free, fair, and legitimate election in Nigeria is on the verge of becoming impossible.

The history of election violence in Nigeria is almost as interesting as the country's political history. The first and second republics of Nigeria were marked by a high level of violence throughout the nation. According to Osuntokun (2012), the situation in the south-west was the most acute. The area was dubbed the "Wild Wild West" as a result of this. The aforementioned acts of violence were in response to the regional elections of 1965. According to Osuntokun (2012), the elections were manipulated so thoroughly and methodically that civil war erupted in several parts of the nation. When the militarized police were unable to resolve the situation, the army was called in. Because of this move, the political leadership of the country was revealed. When the military saw that political power depended on the military, some radicals within the military just pushed the political leaders out in a "coup d'état" that caused a lot of deaths.

According to Ajayi and Olaniyi (2004) and Oyeneye, Onyenwenu, and Olosunde (2002), the military-run general elections in 1979 were reasonably calm. However, the elections in 1983 were marred by irregularities, as they had been in 1964 and 1965. The then-Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) could not be described as impartial, and the former National Party of Nigeria (NPN) federal administration was accused of utilizing the military and other security services to suppress dissent. It was also suggested that several police officers be stationed in communities to carry out the orders of the federal government. People in the south-west responded violently after hearing the results of governorship elections in Old Ondo and Oyo States, when the reigning party, the Unity Party of

Nigeria, fell to the National People's Party (NPN). The picture, together with other socio-political issues plaguing the country, sparked the December 31, 1983, coup.

In the year 1998, a political dispensation was established with the goal of restoring order to the country and gaining acceptance in the international community. The elections went off without a hitch and were rather peaceful. People accepted the results despite the anomalies because they needed to get rid of the military regime via elections. "The worst civilian administration is better than the finest military rule" was a popular phrase at the time. Violence erupted again in 2003, this time because some individuals wanted to take control while the current administration wanted to stay in power. The majority of the violence occurred before and during the elections. The South-West was once again at the centre of action when the then-president, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, a Yoruba man who was not well-liked by his own people in 1999, wanted the region to join what he called "the mainstream of Nigerian politics," which included voting out the ruling Alliance for Democracy (AD) in the region. The president felt politically reduced as a result of his lack of domestic support, and he looked motivated to rectify the situation in the 2003 election. He managed to persuade the A.D. state government in the Southwest to back his re-election by pledging to back their own. He used state institutions such as the army, police, and intelligence organizations to oust them from power.

According to Familusi (2008), both the PDP and the AD used violence, but the PDP had the upper hand

since it was the government party. Only in Lagos State did the AD triumph. According to the late Lam Adesina, a former governor of Oyo State, he lost the election to federal power because Obasanjo directed the Commissioner of Police to take orders from Alhaji Lamidi Adedibu, a PDP stalwart. According to Alananu (2005), the violence was not limited to the south-west. For example, in Kwara State, a feud between the late former governor Mohammed Lawal and the late Dr. Olusola Saraki resulted in violence, and in October 2002, Alhaji Lai Mohamed of the AD alleged that ANPP supporters assaulted his convoy.

Alananu (2005) observed that by 2007, politicians were increasingly keen to win elections. As a consequence, unrest broke out in almost every state of the union, resulting in murders and burnings. In Osun State, like in other states, there have been reports of vote box theft, prompting Action Congress gubernatorial candidate Rauf Aregbesola to phone a radio station to report the issue. When the results were revealed, there was a major brawl between PDP and AC supporters. Olagunsoye Oyinlola, the state's former governor, has been accused of utilizing his military expertise to recruit troops to assassinate and terrify his opponents. Deaths were, of course, reported in Ilesa and Oshogbo. Following the publication of the results, many lawsuits ensued, leading to the dismissal of a number of governors and parliamentarians. President Umaru Musa Yar'adua confessed that the election that elected him was not free and fair. The Court of Appeal in Ilorin ordered a repeat gubernatorial election in Ekiti State as a result of the elections. Prior to the election, Dimeji Bankole, the former Speaker of the House of

Representatives, said publicly that military forces would be sent to the state, maybe to quell or prevent bloodshed.

The two biggest parties, the PDP and the AC, were, of course, violent. PDP, on the other hand, was better equipped. There were also a number of fatalities reported. The prospect of intimidation and impending disorder drove the Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC), then Ayoka Adebayo, to retire, but the federal government rejected her resignation. People were so outraged by the announcement of the results that several elderly ladies walked out half-naked, which is the greatest form of female protest in Yorubaland. Beyond Ekiti, violent responses were seen in Osun and other regions of the nation. The declaration attributed to Chief Obasanjo that the 2007 election would be a "do or die" event helped prepare political players for the violence that was evident throughout the process. The AC's motto of "rig and roast" can only be interpreted in terms of the threat of violence.

As predicted in a nation prone to violence, the 2011 elections were no better than the previous ones, according to Onapajo (2012). The response to the presidential election in various northern states, including Borno, Bauchi, Niger, Kaduna, and Kano, reached a peak. Many observers agreed that the election was mostly peaceful, describing the event as a watershed moment in Nigeria's political history. However, as people rejoiced over the election's victory, a large number of people went to the streets, plundering, looting, and trashing private and public property. Many people died, even individuals who had little or no

knowledge of the election. Participants from other regions of the nation were not spared by the demonstrators. The turmoil was attributed to the style of campaign that politicians and political parties ran in the run-up to the elections. Following the election, there was a disclosure concerning the military's role in Ekiti State. The recorded voice of a former minister was loud enough to persuade people that the state was under assault, making the opposition vulnerable. The recent confession of Dr. Taye Aluko, a former PDP state secretary, has further proved the election's character. The election results were approved by Aluko, the PDP's main agent. He stated under oath before the election petition tribunal that the election was free and fair. Aluko has exposed himself as a participant in a staged election fraud through his candid confession.

In worldwide and local politics, belief, which has no specific meaning, is a crucial factor. In Nigeria, there are three major religions: African traditional beliefs, Islam, and Christianity. The latter two beliefs are the most important and relevant in the lives of their believers. Fox (2001) identified three important characteristics of the role of belief in international and domestic politics. To begin with, international legislation is based on religious viewpoints. Second, belief serves as a foundation for securing government decisions both globally and locally. Third, religious confrontations usually attract both international and domestic attention. According to Ellis and Haar (1998), there has always been a connection between faith and politics, or between faith and national beliefs. Belief seems to have the potential to be used as a political instrument in third-world nations like Nigeria. It has

evolved into a valuable and significant factor in political debate.

## **Factors Promoting Election Violence in Nigeria**

Elections serve as a battlefield for resource control, raising the stakes and increasing the chance of confrontations. In Nigeria, incumbents' dominance, state control of productive resources, economic dominance, and security politicization are among the elements fueling election violence.

### **1. Incumbents' dominance**

To begin, it is worth noting that a lot of studies are based on the assumption, which has been experimentally proved, that the incumbent party is the primary perpetrator of violence (Onapajo, 2014). In his research, Mehler (2007) claims that violent behaviour more commonly comes from governing parties; particularly in multiparty systems that fail to achieve the minimum democratic requirement.

### **2. The opposition parties' opposition**

According to the reports, post-election violence was more associated with opposition parties than with the government. The disturbances usually took the shape of demonstrations against the incumbent party's actions (Onapajo, 2014). It was believed that riots would take the form of assaults on INEC offices, party offices, and properties utilized by politicians. It should be noted that most of these violent demonstrations took place after the election results were announced, indicating that they

could not have impacted the outcome (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2007). There is also no convincing evidence that the results of those tests impacted election judges or the Court of Appeal's decisions to annul elections in several of these difficult states.

### 3. Economic hegemony

Based on a complicated arrangement between itself and the 36 states, the federal government is the sole recipient, divider, and distributor of oil money. As a result, most of the country's economic activity is governed by politics, and many private sector actors rely on government favours.

### 4. Monetary gains

Public works and procurement, whether federal or state-run, are significant sources of revenue and employment, and they are fueled by oil money. One's political ties determine one's capacity to secure contracts. Politics has been the only way for many political hopefuls to improve their circumstances. Others is motivated by personal status or just the desire to have control over people and resources. Winning elections is the endpoint for individuals pursuing financial gain. Candidates—and their financial supporters—are often believed to spend significantly in elections in order to reap profits on their investments if and when they win.



## 5. Religion and ethnicity

Long-standing religious and ethno-regional conflicts exacerbate the problem, making elections a struggle for political dominance and resource control among Nigeria's many ethnic groups. Candidates have often utilized provocative language between competing groups, such as Christians and Muslims, to incite violence as a political tool (see Ottuh, 2008).

## 6. Arms proliferation

Nigeria's post-election violence has been exacerbated by weak regulations against the proliferation of arms and light weapons. As a consequence of election violence, the departure and admission of guns across permeable borders have also led to violent conflict. Thugs have been observed carrying guns during electioneering campaigns in order to terrorize the unsuspecting public, and the arms have remained in circulation after the polls. This is why, even after elections, weapons are utilized in some kind of crime.

## 7. State security politicized

At the same time, the rules that regulate Nigeria's security and law enforcement organizations imply that they may be controlled by the government. The president appoints the Inspector General of Police on the suggestion of the Nigeria Police Council, the Senate confirms his appointment, and he may be fired at any time. Military service chiefs and other leaders of the State Security Services are in the same boat. This is not unique to Nigeria, but security and law enforcement

agents are commonly seen as loyal to the current administration and as weapons for intimidating and harassing opponents. During election season, politicians on both sides often express their mistrust of security and law enforcement services, accusing them of being biased and this creates a volatile political environment and candidates—including those from the ruling party—hires thugs and criminals to commit acts of violence or intimidate opponents. Other factors that have promoted election violence in Nigeria are ineffective election regulations, poverty, unemployment, hate speech (through social media and the media), and a lack of effective teamwork.

### **Impact of Election Violence on Nigeria**

The impacts of election violence on Nigeria are identified below:

1. Participation in elections and politics

Voting, attending election campaigns, working for a candidate, attending community meetings, joining lobbying efforts, attending a demonstration, writing a letter, contacting leaders, and group membership are all examples of political participation, according to Bratton, Mattes, and Gyimah-Boadi (2005). The act of participating in an election, from election registration through voting on the day of the election, is referred to as "electoral participation." Electoral violence has an impact on voter turnout. Systematic research on the influence of election violence on voter turnout has shown a negative correlation between the two (Shenga & Pereira, 2019). According to a cross-sectional study

(Bratton, 2013), voters in Nigeria who have been threatened with electoral violence are less likely to vote. Election violence influences the desire to vote, although this effect varies by political affiliation and unique electoral circumstances (Burchard, 2015). Violence, on the other hand, has a major and negative impact on voter participation. Voters avoid attending election campaign rallies because they are afraid of violence in their neighbourhood. Extremist organizations' threats of violence undermine people's willingness to vote and work for parties or candidates. Threats of violence, particularly in new democracies, may have a detrimental impact on election participation. The detrimental impacts of violent intimidation on voting participation may occasionally be mitigated by public awareness initiatives. It is typically impossible for anti-electoral violence efforts to reach every voter in a nation. Nonetheless, efforts may have an indirect impact on more people than they can directly target. Family relationships, social contacts, and geographical closeness, for example, might help distribute the content of information campaigns, enabling them to reach a larger number of people.

## 2. Economic consequences

Electoral violence has mostly occurred in the previous three decades, and it has morphed into a political nightmare in the middle of other forms of violence that have political and economic ramifications for the continent's growth. Post-election violence has a detrimental impact on society's economic activities because, when large-scale violence breaks out, productivity is reduced to a bare minimum as people flee

for safety. When there isn't adequate protection to prevent property vandalism, hoodlums take over the environment and brutalize innocent individuals, putting the whole society at risk. During a time of conflict, progress is often disrupted. Infrastructure such as schools, hospitals, pipe-borne water systems, and other government institutions are being demolished. The resources that the administration intended to employ to improve the system would instead be redirected to security and the reconstruction of devastated infrastructure, obstructing progress.

### 3. Instability in politics

Nigeria has a winner-take-all mentality and a lack of sportsmanship. Be modest enough to prepare for the next election if you lose. The outbreak of violence prompts the opponent to use the opportunity to dispute the election by using the unfavourable circumstances. Election challenges also hinder growth by causing political office holders to engage in primitive wealth acquisition, preventing them from focusing on governance, and development suffers as a result. In Nigeria, electoral violence is both a cause and a symptom of political instability (Peter & Rahman, 2018). It is symptomatic because it represents a stumbling political system. It is also causal in that it exacerbates the political crises that occur on a regular basis. Electoral violence, if not dealt with appropriately, has the potential to increase violence. Escalating conflict in the country may result in death.

#### 4. Violations of human rights

According to Ottuh and Aitufe (2008), human rights abuses and violations are common phenomenon in the Nigerian society spanning between 1999 and 2005 till date, especially, as it relates to sharia. According to Human Rights Watch (2011), post-election violence in 2011 led over 65,000 people to evacuate their homes and tent in Kaduna, Bauchi, Gombe, and Kano states, as well as Niger, Sokoto, Anambra, and Plateau states (Peter & Rahman, 2018). People may be internally displaced, while others can become refugees, particularly those who flee to another nation for safety reasons. During violent confrontations, women and children are frequently the ones who suffer the most. Women may be raped, and when their husbands are slain, the women often suffer in order to provide for the family.

#### **Using Religion to Curb Election Violence**

A range of strategies are employed to regulate and prevent election violence. Controlling and preventing election violence involves local and international monitoring and observation missions, as well as national, regional, and local conflict resolution and mediation missions. There are five distinct types of election violence prevention strategies: First, by enforcing naming and shaming and increasing awareness of growing tensions, the presence of monitors may serve to prevent violence. Mediation may be used to address an ongoing election-related argument in high-stress situations. Fourth, law enforcement highlights the deterrent impact of security forces; fifth, voter-focused programmes stress the need for long-term prevention

through developing democratic principles and tolerance in society; and seventh, religious institutions preach peace, societal values, human values, and peaceful coexistence. Nigeria has been certified as one of the world's most religious nations (Adamo, 2018). As a result, it should come as no surprise that religion will play a significant role in Nigerian elections. Religion plays a significant role in the lives of Nigerians, as shown not only by our Constitution but also by our political and electoral customs. Religion, as shown by history, exists, survives, and continues to impact and shape humanity's peace (Isiramen, 2010). There isn't a single country on the planet that has managed to avoid religion. If the government and the country strive to remove religion from people's lives and politics, they will be on a road of contradiction.

Electoral violence is a kind of Machiavellianism and a sign that morality has disappeared from Nigerian politics. Machiavelli thinks that the most important thing in politics is to strive to gain power by whatever means necessary, whether legal or illegal (Familusi, 2017). Given the religious predisposition of many players in the democratic process, one should anticipate a peaceful election. Our guidance will be the ethics of Nigeria's three main religions: Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion. Whatever the justifications for election violence, they do not pass the Christian ethics test. Advocating for a nonviolent response to tyranny and injustice is not incompatible with self-defense, family defence, or even church defence. Muslims are commanded to live in peace with one another in Islam. In Islam, peace is defined as avoiding causing damage to others. Traditional African religion

promotes peace by emphasizing the sacredness of human lives, which are often lost to violence. Religion will be a true weapon for establishing free, fair, and legitimate elections if the value of peace is instilled in all participants in the democratic process, especially those with religious inclinations. These ideals are essential for elections to be credible and devoid of violence.

Religious leaders have a number of attributes that make them well-suited to mobilize stakeholders and participate in initiatives to reduce violence and promote peace (Haider, 2016). These include: trustworthiness and credibility; a shared and respected set of values with different sides of a conflict and unique leverage as spiritual leaders; understanding of the local context, presence in local communities, and local legitimacy; strong networks and access to various levels of power; and understanding of the local context, presence in local communities, and local legitimacy. Religious leaders' willingness to participate in politics and peace-building may vary. In Africa, for example, leaders of newer reformist churches are less inclined to participate in political discussions and peace efforts than leaders of established churches (Cooke, 2015). Religious leaders vary in their abilities to successfully participate in violent conflict resolution. De Juan, Pierskalla, & Vüllers (2015) found that those who work in an environment with strong horizontal networks (common religious beliefs, symbols, and activities) and strong vertical networks (connections between religious leaders and believers) are better informed and able to coordinate conflict resolution efforts. Religious leaders' power is also influenced by the religion's organizational structure. Religious leaders may help to reduce electoral and

political violence and promote peace in a variety of ways. Peace messages and support for free and fair elections; civic education, debates, and election monitoring; standards of behaviour; intra- and interfaith communication; and interfaith projects are just a few examples.

According to some estimates, religious undertones are present in almost half of all violent engagements (Basedou & Koos, 2015). According to case studies, religious leaders may sometimes incite violence. Close relationships between political and religious leaders, as well as existing group disparities, are likely to enhance the possibility of demands for violence. Religious views have been exploited as a means of raising voter turnout, which has resulted in increased communal divides. According to a report released by Kenya's Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC), church leaders and elders were involved in inciting ethnic-based violence during the 1992 and 2007 national elections. The reluctance of Kenyan churches to speak out against corruption has exacerbated dissatisfaction and harmed their reputation and capacity to create national cohesion. In numerous Nigerian states, Christian and Muslim leaders have appealed to their congregations, especially the young and underprivileged, to remain calm. They've also urged their supporters to register, collect their ballots, and vote in a peaceful manner. In Borno state, the head of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) advised people to put religious connections aside and vote for candidates who would better their living circumstances. Religious leaders have also facilitated civic education, candidate debates, and election monitoring—typically in larger



groups. By organizing and supporting televised public discussions, religious leaders and organizations have played a beneficial and nonpartisan role in recent election cycles. Local interviewers in Lagos state stated that the televised event organized by the Anglican Church of Nigeria's Dioceses helped to curb hate speech and aggressive vocabulary. Some Christian and Muslim leaders in Rivers State used local networks to monitor developments on the ground and try to avert deadly conflicts.

Religious leaders and institutions in Kaduna State, Nigeria, have largely played a good and non-partisan role in previous election cycles, despite charges of prejudice. Archbishop John Onaiyekan and the Sultan of Sokoto, Mohammad Sa'ad Abubakar, are two examples of those who have spoken out in favour of peaceful cooperation and de-escalation of hostilities (Onwudiwe & Berwind-Dart, 2010). Imam Muhammad Ashafa and Pastor James Wuye, co-directors of the Muslim-Christian Interfaith Mediation Centre (and past adversaries), have urged communities to keep elections calm. In Nigeria, Christian and Muslim leaders often issue joint declarations and fund activities aimed at reducing inflammatory speech and inter-religious violence. During the 2003 election in Nigeria, the Inter-faith Mediation Centre attempted an earlier endeavour with a contract from the United States Institute of Peace. Misconceptions and preconceptions were dispelled, favourable attitudes toward the opposing religion group were generated, and actions for a continuing conversation were discussed.

## **Conclusion**

Since the return of democracy in 1999, electoral malpractices, money politics, electoral violence, and ethno-religious split tactics by the political elite have dominated the Nigerian electoral process. Electoral violence has been a scourge on Nigeria's political stability and prosperity since the country's independence. The topic of electoral violence in Nigeria is explored in this article, with a focus on the Fourth Republic. Nigeria requires constitutional and legal changes to reduce political monopolization of resources and support future peaceful elections. The appeal of political power must be diminished, making political office less attractive as a source of income. Inflammatory language and intimidation should be made illegal. To develop impartial and competent security services that inspire public trust and confidence, political influence on law enforcement institutions must be minimized.

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