

## **Electoral violence, malpractice and justice system in Nigeria: a Christian Critique.**

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### **Abstract**

Although the menace of electoral violence and malpractice did not start in Nigeria with the current political dispensation but it has assumed a worrisome dimension since the return to democratic rule in 1999. Electoral violence and malpractice have become a recurring decimal in the history of electioneering process in Nigeria which has portrayed the nation in bad image globally. The process is characterized with violent behaviors such as snatching and stuffing of ballot boxes, shooting, maiming, falsification of results and ominous judicial injustices. Some politicians employ these tools before, during and sometimes after elections to manipulate the voting pattern of the electorates. Some persons are hired and handsomely remunerated to cause mayhem and perpetuate all manner of electoral crimes in order to scare away voters and perceived opponents. The results are manipulation and falsification of results in their favour and, sometimes in collaboration with the electoral umpires and party agents, benched on electoral injustice. The judicial system in Nigeria has also become susceptible to the manipulations of greedy politicians to the extent that litigations on electoral offences become endless battle. The objective of the paper is to examine the trends in election related crimes with a view to recommending biblical principles that will help in mitigating the menace and ensuring electoral justice, free and fair elections in the electoral system in Nigeria. In doing this, the paper adopts the historical, expository and hermeneutical methods in the critical interpretation of the phenomena. It discovers that electoral violence has become deeply rooted in electoral process in Nigeria over the years and that the judicial system has failed to evolve a judicial practice that will ensure electoral offenses are eliminated in Nigeria. The paper recommends the establishment of Electoral Offences Commission to be headed by a religious practitioner, a massive education of the electorates by the Church on election and leadership. Finally offenders of electoral crimes should be sanctioned by the State for a number of years to serve as deterrent to others within the political space.

**Keywords:** Electoral Violence, Malpractice, Justice System, Christian, critique.

### **Introduction**

There are many reasons these ugly trends have remained unabated. Some of the reasons include lack of transparency in the entire electoral process,

the syndrome of stay- put - in office/power, do- or-die attitude introduced by the former President, Olusegun Obasanjo. Other reasons may include but not limited to wrong attitude towards leadership, growing trend of impunity and shielding of electoral offenders. The issues have come to a point where many electorates now show apathy to elections in Nigeria. Many have lost confidence in the genuineness and integrity of elections because the entire process has not been able to engender confidence in the electorates as well as contestants (Itodo, 2019). Elections in Nigeria are largely controversial. Some contestants have been declared winners of elections by the Independence National Commission (INEC) only for Election Tribunals to overturn the results. However, the strong belief of most Nigerians is that election integrity is possible but will require some more effort.

#### **a. Electoral Violence**

Violence generally entails the use of physical force, usually with the purpose of injuring, damaging the object. The tool of such violence can range from flying fists and feet to clubs and bullets to nerve gas and nuclear missiles (Alanamu, 2005). There are different categories of violence such as political violence, electoral violence, religious violence, institutional violence, etc. Political violence refers to all forms of collective attacks within a political system. According to Anifowose as quoted by Alanamu (2005):

A political violence is the use of threat or physical act carried out by an individual or a group of another individual or individuals and/or properties to death of person and/or damage or destruction to property, and whose objective, choice or target or victims, surrounding circumstances, implementation, and effects have political significance. That is, it tends to modify the behavior of others in the existing arrangement of a power structure that has some consequences for the political system

While we agree with the definition of political violence above, our major concern here is electoral violence which is actually a subset of political violence. In electoral violence, actors employ force to advance their interests or achieve specific political end. It includes acts such as assassination of opponents or spontaneous fistcuffs between rival groups or supporters and threat to coercion and intimidation of opponents, voters, or election officials (Sisk, 2013).

Sisk (2013) also defines electoral violence as an act or threats of coercion, intimidation or physical harm perpetrated to affect an electoral

process or that which arises in the context of electoral competition when perpetrated to affect an election process. Violence may be employed to influence the process of election such as effort to delay, disrupt, or derail a poll and to influence the outcomes, the determining of winners in competitive races for political office or to secure approval or disapproval of referendum question.

Igbuzor (2010) perceives electoral violence to mean any act perpetuated in the course of political activities including pre, during and after election. These definitions will form our working definitions of electoral violence. However, there are new trends in electoral violence in Nigeria that may not have been captured by these definitions which will be discussed later.

### **b. The concept of Electoral Justice**

According to the International IDEA and Handbook (2010), Electoral Justice involves the means and mechanism available in a specific country, local community or on a regional or international level for:

- Ensuring that each action, procedure and decision related to the electoral process complies with the legal frameworks
- Protecting or restoring electoral right and
- Giving people who believe their electoral right have been violated the ability to file a challenge, have their cases heard and receive a ruling

The Handbook further states that Electoral justice is a key instrument of the rule of law and the ultimate guarantee of compliance with democratic principle of holding free, fair and genuine elections. Many countries of the world do have their legal framework and alternative mechanism to address electoral injustice. In Nigeria, a number of mechanisms have been put in place to ensure there is electoral justice. The Independent National Electorate Commission (INEC) is a body vested with powers to conduct free and fair elections in Nigeria. INEC is not unaware that electoral justice is what every electorate and contestant wants to engender electoral confidence. Long before now, Election Tribunals were put in place to handle all electoral offences and infringement. There are other alternative mechanisms that involve the services of some non-governmental bodies ready to assist in resolving electoral differences in an informal way such as conflict resolution committee of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN).

The Information Handbook of International IDEA added that the concept of electoral justice goes beyond simply enforcing the legal framework. It is also a factor in the overall design and conduct of all electoral processes and influences the actions of the stakeholders within them. Electoral justice system

of a people is influenced by their history, socio – cultural practices, and political contexts in which they operate. However, there should be common denominators such as adherence to a number of norms and values in order to guarantee the credibility of an election.

### **Historical Background of Electoral Violence, Malpractices and Judicial Injustices in Nigeria**

Electoral violence in Nigeria predates the Independence in 1960 but for the purpose of this paper, we shall limit our discussion of electoral violence to the political history of Nigerian since the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> Republic on 29<sup>th</sup> May, 1999. Since 1999 general election, the present democratic dispensation has not been without violence. This violence manifests in form of ethnic rivalry, socio – religious crisis, party clashes and disturbances (Anifowose, 1982). The Fourth Republic was characterized with violence that is electorally and politically related which has destroyed many lives and properties. Available statistics indicates that over 10,000 lives were lost to election – related crises since 1999 till date (Olakunle, Bamidele, Modupe, 2019).

In this present era, six general elections have been conducted to elect leaders at different strata and arms of government. The first general election in the 4<sup>th</sup> Republic was in May 1999. This election witnessed minimal election related violence in comparison with subsequent ones (Bamidele, 2018). President Olusegun Obasanjo won the election with a mandate to serve for four years. In 2003, there came the second general election in the 4<sup>th</sup> Republic. Whereas the 1999 election was conducted and monitored by the military, the 2003 election was purely a civilian affair. There was a resurgence of electoral violence in 2003 like in the previous republics. This was largely due to the fact that president Obasanjo was going for second tenure in office. At this time, more politicians were interested in contesting the election. As a result, the 2003 was characterized with manipulation, rigging, thuggery and assassination of perceived political opponents. All these were master- minded by the Peoples Democratic Party in order to continue to perpetuate itself in office. At the end of President Obasanjo's second tenure in office, he desired a third term which was vehemently resisted by some Nigerians.

The general election of 2007 is best described by most Nigerians as the worst election ever. As we approached 2007 election, President Obasanjo introduced the phenomenon of do – or – die into the election process. It was going to be do – or – die for the ruling Peoples' Democratic Party. Animashaun (2008) described the 2007 election as characterized with inflation of results,

massive rigging, releasing of results when elections have not been concluded, intimidation of voters as well as manipulation of security agents. Results that were announced in Abuja did not tally with result of most polling units. Violent clashes of political parties, bombing, politically master – minded killing were widely reported by the Human Right Organizations (Thovoethin, 2015).

The late President Umaru Musa Yar’dua acknowledged that the election that brought him into power in 2007 was not free, fair and genuine. As a result of this, he constituted an electoral reform committee which was headed by Justice Uwais. Eventually, some of their recommendations were included in the amended electoral Act. President Yar’dua did not interfere with tribunal judgment of the various petitions. Many PDP governors were removed from office in Ekiti, Osun, Edo and Ondo having been declared winners initially (Aniekwe, 2011).

The 2011 general election was a departure from the previous elections. It was considered by most Nigerians and some non-governmental organizations and international community as the most peaceful election in the 4<sup>th</sup> republic. Agbambu and Ajayi (2011) reported that Terence McCulley, U.S Ambassador to Nigeria commended the 2011 elections especially, the National Assembly election of 2011 as the first ever credible and transparent election in Nigeria. They further remarked that the 2011 election provided a historic opportunity for Nigeria to consolidate its democracy and further expand its voice on the world stage.

Northern politicians had threatened 2011 election based on the argument that the mandate of the North was not over following the death of late President Musa Yar’dua. They tried to restrain Goodluck Jonathan from contesting but to no avail (Obia, 2010). After Goodluck Jonathan won, the Northern States were thrown into confusion. According to the report of Human Rights Watch (2011) over eight hundred persons died as a result of post election violence with over 48,000 displaced in twelve Northern states (Omenazu, 2011). As Nigeria approached 2015 general election, the situation in the Country was already tensed. President Muhammadu Buhari had threatened that if he did not win the election this time, both monkey and baboon will be soaked in blood (Kukah, 2017). The emergence of Boko Haran also added to the challenges. Many people were killed even before the elections commenced.

The two major parties were P.D.P and A.P.C. A. P. C. is a conglomeration of A.C.N., CNPP, APGA and other political parties in 2013. Many P.D.P. stalwart decamped to A.P.C., thereby boosting the chances of Buhari as the A. P. C. presidential flag – bearer. Eventually, history was made in 2015 when Muhammadu Buhari became the first politician to defeat an

incumbent. According to Gordon (2015), the National Peace Committee for 2015 General Election led by former military ruler, General Abdulsalami Abukakar (rtd) facilitated peace accord between the two major contestants, General Buhari and President Jonathan. There were many persons or groups that intervened to make sure there was peace before, during and after the election. Security test assessment was carried out by various election-related groups. The CLEEN foundation, one of such groups, reported that about fifteen states including the FCT were in red alert level. The Human Right Commission (NHRC) reported that over 58 individuals have been assassinated prior to the 2015 election (CLEEN, 2015). The use of card readers and permanent voter's card were introduced to minimize casualty. A mega opposition party, APC was formed with Major General Muhammadu Buhari as the Presidential candidate.

The election came with all the anticipated violence being unleashed. The European Union (EU) Election Observation Mission presented a report indicating that over 30 persons were murdered on April 11, 2015 as a result of inter-party clashes and attacks on election sites (EU. EOM, 2015). Despite all the threats, 2015 election was considered successful and credible than any other election since the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> Republic. General Buhari, who was contesting for Presidency for the 4<sup>th</sup> time won the election under APC platform thereby defeating the incumbent, President Goodluck Jonathan.

The most recent general election was that of 2019. During the election, the P.D.P. was determined to reclaim power while President Buhari was also prepared to re-contest. The entire process shows that injustice, irregularities, and electoral violence are still very much part of our electoral engineering. The head of European Union's Observation Mission to Nigeria's presidential and National assembly elections, Maria Arena, reported that 2019 General Election was hit by operational shortcomings that made it difficult for voters (Vanguard, Feb. 26, 2019). Arena further stated that the postponement of general election by one week (February 16 to 23) damaged public confidence in the process and reduced voters' turnout. Similarly, the Commonwealth Observer Group leader, Dr. Jakarta Kikwete (2019) said organizational, logistical and technical difficulties in 2019 elections prevented most voters from executing their franchise during the elections.

A police Sergeant, Idoko Sunday was shot dead on Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> February, 2019 by some political thugs who attempted to snatch election results that were being conveyed from Ipokia to Ilaro, Ogun State. There was a widespread violence and disruption of elections in Rivers leading to indefinite suspension of election. Violence occurred in a substantial number of polling units and collation centers. Staff taken hostage and materials including result

sheets were either been seized or destroyed by hoodlums. Military interference was largely reported(Vanguard, March 18, 2019).

Pandemonium broke out in collation centre at Tafawa Balewa LGA over the announcement of result. Heavy clashes between PDP and APC representatives lead to the cancellation of results. According to Lakemfa(2019), Nigerians who are alive today (March 10) should wish themselves happy survival because scores of their compatriots have been sent to untimely graves within the last five weeks in election- related violence(Vanguard, March 11, 2019).

One of the worst of such violence is the murder of Ibisaki Amachree, a computer scientist and an adhoc staff of INEC in Bakana, Degema LGA of Rivers State, who was shot dead during the presidential and national assembly elections on February23, 2019. She had conducted elections and was going to submit her election report for collation when she was shot dead.

### **Current Manifestation of Electoral Violence**

Electoral violence in Nigeria has taken a new dimension. For example, Sirake Dickson, the immediate past Governor of Bayelsa State described the November 16, 2019 gubernatorial election of Bayelsa and Kogi States as a “political coup” (Vanguard, November 23, 2019) . Electoral violence did not begin with the 4<sup>th</sup> Republic but it merely changed posture.

According to Anene (2019), another worrisome dimension of electoral violence today is the involvement of security agents in electoral violence and malpractices. There is now a situation where Security agents aid and abate electoral crimes. Examples are those of Port Harcourt, Bayelsa and Kogi States in 2019. Closely related to this is desperation on the part of the political players. Political office is perceived by many as the most profitable venture in Nigeria as a result, everyone wants to join politics. Those who are already there make deliberate effortsto perpetuate themselves in office indefinitely. Consequently, they are ready to do anything to ensure they retain their positions.

What we have today can only be described as civilian rule and not political democracy (Akunna, 2019). Impunity on the part of government, especially flagrant disobedience to the rule of law has become commonplace. Currently, our Democracy is producing dictatorship so much so that illegality is defended by the government. The military was given a marching order to shoot at sight any individual who attempts to snatch ballot box during the 2019 General elections.

## **Electoral Justice System in Nigeria and the conduct of Elections.**

According to the International IDEA and handbook (2010), an Electoral Justice System is a key to elections. It is an instrument of the rule of law, and the ultimate guarantee of compliance with the democratic principles of holding free, fair and genuine elections. What do we mean by free, fair and genuine election? It is an election that is devoid of electoral irregularities; an election that complies with the fundamental electoral guidelines by the electorates, election umpires and contestants (Itodo, 2019). Political activities during build-up to general Elections in 2019, the media battle engaged by politicians, occurrences of violence and ballot box-snuffing on election day by party members across the divides of political parties are evidences of a system of thought that is not just organized but also gradually forming the basis of political decision-making (Ololajulo, 2019).

The aims of an Electoral Justice System therefore are to identify and prevent irregularities before, during and after an election, and to provide the means and mechanism to correct these irregularities and punish the perpetrators, where necessary. An irregularity occurs when a given action, procedure, or decision related to the electoral process does not comply with the law. An irregularity is likely going to result in dispute hence the electoral justice system tries to prevent dispute by ensuring that elections are free and fair. Accordingly, the design of an appropriate electoral justice system is fundamental to democratic legitimacy and the credibility of the electoral process.

To promote justice in the electioneering process, the Electoral Justice System must effectively display independence, inclusiveness and equality. If the electorate or contestants suspect or show any lack of confidence in the integrity of the electoral justice system, that will hinder the acceptance of their judgment. A robust, sound and timely electoral justice is a veritable element in maintaining election credibility.

The mechanism of Electoral Justice System should include preventive measures through both formal and informal means of resolving electoral disputes. Formal or corrective mechanism involves the filling of and processing of electoral challenges in the various election tribunals and Appeal Courts. Formal mechanism also includes punitive mechanism especially in the case of criminal offences. Here, the perpetrators are punished by imposing penalty. The informal or alternative mechanism is voluntary and helps to settle disputes for the parties in disputes. Although Electoral Justice System does not itself guarantee free, fair and genuine election but its absence can exacerbate the already existing frictions or even lead to armed or violent conflict. What



happened in Kenya's election in 2007 was an example of what can happen when electoral justice system is absent or ineffective.

Here in Nigeria even though there is Electoral Justice System in place, the conduct of free, fair and credible election is still a challenge. Many Nigerians are gradually losing interest in participating in elections because elections seem to lack credibility. A situation where people win election by snatching ballot boxes and display all manner of electoral malpractices cannot engender confidence. A situation where electoral officials aid and abate electoral malpractices will certainly create doubt in the hearts of the electorate and contestants. Desperate politicians go as far as influencing tribunal judgments in their favour by offering bribe to judicial officials runs foul of the aim and objectives of the establishment of the Electoral Justice System. When Sarieke Diction described the last gubernatorial elections in Kogi and Bayelsa States as "a political coup", he was trying to cast aspersion on the credibility of the entire election. When tribunal cases are delayed unnecessarily by allowing the wrong person to stay in office for a long time while the actual winner waits endlessly for judgment to be delivered, it leaves much to be desired. Some judges have been sanctioned in Nigeria for this action. One of the greatest challenges facing the conduct of credible election is to rebuild trust in the electorates and contestants on the Electoral justice system. Electoral reform should also include finding ways to ensure that those who conduct elections are transparent and honest.

### **Causes and Implications of Electoral Violence, Malpractice and Judicial Injustice.**

- a. Ethnic rivalry is one of the reasons for electoral violence in Nigeria. Nigeria is a country of over 200million citizens and with over 400 ethnic groups (NPC,2000). However, the political equation in Nigeria divides the country into North and South. The Presidency since 1999 rotates between the Northern and Southern blocs. This dichotomy has brought a lot of rivalry in the democratic experience in Nigeria. Voting pattern has been conditioned by this same division. Any attempt to disregard this arrangement leads to political crisis that has resulted in the loss of life and properties (Obaditan, 2003). Ethnic rivalry has significant effects in the overall governance of Nigeria. It has encouraged incompetence in our political experience. Those who are competent in leadership are excluded in the governance process because they have to wait endlessly for the turn of their ethnic group thereby creating room for selection of candidate rather than election.
- b. The second reason for electoral violence and malpractices in Nigeria is desperation on the part of politicians. Many politicians in Nigeria are

desperate in their pursuit for political offices. Everyone wants to win at all cost as a result they become prone to electoral offences (Akunna,2019). Elections in Nigeria have witnessed bribery of electoral officers and party heads. It has also witnessed burning of INEC facilities like the case of Akwa Ibom and other States in 2019. Ballot box stuffing and snatching are also evidence of desperation on the part of politicians. The effects of all these bad behaviors are that there is widespread voters' apathy. People are afraid to come out to exercise their electoral duty because they are not sure their lives will be safe. This has also painted the nation in a bad light before the International community. Violence in election has lead to loss of lives and destruction of valuable properties.

- c. Lack of credibility in the electoral process in Nigeria leads to electoral violence, malpractice and injustice. Many Nigerians believe that elections in Nigeria are by selection. That is, many who are occupying political offices are perceived to have bribed or rigged their way to their various offices. Operational shortcoming has done great harm to elections in Nigeria. Lack of adherence to the due process by the body vested with the powers to conduct election has contributed negatively to the electoral crimes being witness in Nigeria (Anene,2019). This may be in form of undue and abrupt postponement and cancellation of elections. In 2007 general election, results were released before the conclusion of the elections. Rigging and inflation of election results also contributing to lack of credibility in the process (Itodo, 2019). These have resulted to loss of confidence in INEC by the voting populace. Since voters' participation does not matter, many have decided not to participate in future elections. This is not good for the consolidation of Democracy in Nigeria.
- d. Inter and intra party violence is a contributing factor to electoral violence and malpractice in Nigeria (Obaditan, 2003). Apart from one party clashing with the other, there are also situations where implosion occurs within a party usually due to disagreement. For example, most party primaries from 1999 till 2019 were characterized with violence. This attitude has made some well-meaning individuals to withdraw from partisan politics thereby leaving political parties in the hands of some unscrupulous elements. There are usually violent clashes each time two or more parties meet one another during political campaigns or rallies. Inter party clashes leads to loss of lives and properties which seems to retard development of political parties.
- e. Impunity on the part of politicians is one of the new and ugly trends manifesting in Nigerian politics. Because electoral offenders are rarely punished, there is now impunity demonstrated by perpetrators of poll violence (Yabagi, 2020). These perpetrators now boldly and violently disrupt electoral process without any fear of being arrested and prosecuted. Impunity has also given rise to ballot box snatching and stuffing. Ballot

boxes can be hijacked together with result sheets without any resistance. The Judicial System has been hijacked by politicians especially a ruling party such that judicial officers now operate under the whims and caprices of politicians. This has raised many questions and doubts on the genuineness of the electoral Justice in Nigeria. Today, apathy concerning elections in Nigeria has risen greatly.

### **A Christian Response to Electoral Violence and Electoral Injustice in Nigeria**

The Researcher believes that a Christian approach to electoral violence and electoral injustice in the Nigeria political space will provide the needed panacea to mitigate, if not eliminate violence, malpractice and injustice in the conduct of elections in Nigeria. The role of the church in the overall development of Nigeria can never be underestimated (Kukah, 1998). The role of the church in this regard is to mitigate and if possible eradicate electoral violence and injustice.

We shall consider and critically examine some scriptures that form the biblical foundation for a Christian response to electoral violence, malpractice and electoral injustice in the Nigerian political system and recommend how these scriptures can be applied in mitigating electoral crimes in Nigeria.

Genesis 6:9-12 and it reads

“These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God. And Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth. And God said to Noah, “I have determined to make an end of all flesh; for the earth is filled with violence through them; behold, I will destroy them with the earth” (RSV).

The text above gives a picture of a man by name Noah who decided to do things differently in his generation. Everyone was corrupt except Noah. “God looked” denotes a special observance, as though He had instituted an inquiry into its real condition (Swaggart, 2010). The more accurate biblical meaning of the word translated corrupt is lawlessness. Everyone choose to do what is contrary and lawless but Noah together with his sons decided to remain law-abiding. This is very instructive for Nigerians because the situations painted in the periscope are a synopsis of the current situations in Nigeria. Everyone

was corrupt or lawless except a family. The fight against corruption in Nigeria has been so difficult because so many people including those given the mandate to identify and prosecute corrupt individuals are themselves enmeshed in scandals. The story shows that to be free from corruption is a choice. Until everyone begins to make a resolve to shun corruption, the battle against corruption cannot be won.

People in Noah's day were both corrupt (lawless) and violent (Genesis 6:11), actions for which judgment of God came upon the generations of Noah. Vine (1996) defines violence as a human action which causes destruction, pain and harm to others. That is, an action carried out by man with the intention to cause harm, destruction and pain. The Greek word for corrupt is *Phtheiro* which signifies to destroy by means of corrupting thereby bringing it into worse state (Mueller, 2013). Another word used for corruption is "Anomia" which is frequently translated as lawlessness. This definition sets forth its essential character as the rejection of the law, or will of God and the substitution of the will of self. God was angry with the people because of the twin evils of corruption and violence. Every act of violence and corruption attracts judgment. How was Noah able to overcome the temptation to involve his family in the corruption, lawlessness and violence in the world during his time? He had the fear of God and discipline which was based on personal decision. Many have been disgraced in Nigeria because they were engaged in electoral violence. Electoral violence and malpractice will end in Nigeria when individuals begin to take personal responsibility to avoid violence and electoral malpractices.

The word violence is translated from the Hebrew word *Hamas* which connotes the disruption of the divinely established order of things. The first occurrence of the word is in Genesis 6 v. 11. The Greek equivalent for *Hamas* is *Biazo* which denotes the use of force to obtain something (Vine, 1996). We noted that impunity is one of the reasons for electoral violence, malpractices and judicial injustice in Nigeria. Corruption makes people become lawless and violent. They are ready to use the proceeds of their corrupt practices to bribe their way out of any attempt to prosecute them. Noah saw that everyone was lawless or corrupt but he refused to accept corruption as a way of life. This attitude of Noah and his family is recommended as a panacea to the lawlessness that prevails in Nigeria. Christians in Nigeria should reject corruption and ensure that they advocate for a corrupt free state. Noah's story provides us a biblical foundation for dealing with corruption in Nigeria especially in the electoral process.

There is no doubt that the church is not edified with violence. In fact, electoral violence is a phenomenon that is entirely repugnant to Christian teaching. The church generally should condemn violence and any act that is

capable of leading to death and destruction of properties. The church should preach against all forms of violence and warn her members to refrain from physical as well as reprisal attacks. In the face of violence before, during and after an election, Christians should be calm, tolerant and forgiving (Onaiyekan, 2019) Harmonious relationship is preferred to violence.

The sanctity of human life is not negotiable. Human life is sacrosanct and that sanctity must be upheld. Matthew 5:21 states, “you have heard that it was said to those of old, “You shall not murder and whosoever murders will be in danger of the judgment”. This is a reminder of the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment which forbids the shedding of innocent blood. As a result, every political killing should be condemned as sin against divine injunction which will attract heavy punishment. Therefore, Christians in politics should not be engaged in violent behavior, killing, and destruction of the opponents. Fortunately, the church has been involved in the prevention and management of electoral crises in Nigeria through her various organs (Kukah, 1993).

Unfortunately, some of the electoral violence in the history of elections in Nigeria is traceable to some Christians including church leaders. Some Christian politicians have not shown any example as some are involved in unguided utterances, campaign of character assassination while some others dish out prophecies that are capable of inciting one party against another. It is therefore unfortunate to observe that those who supposed to prevent violence are themselves involved.

One of the greatest spiritual duties of Nigerian Christian is to intercede for the peace and unity of the country. The importance of peace and harmony in national development cannot be overemphasized. This duty is made explicit by Apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 2:1-3 which reads: “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way. This is good, and it is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior” (RSV).

Thus, Christians have vital roles in mitigating the effects of electoral violence through the reconciliation of warring parties using dialogue and advocacy. The Church in Nigeria is expected through her various organs or committees to mediate between contending individuals, contestants or parties. Although the church is expected to engage in the reconciliation process, but there are cases where the church stood aloof and allowed the crises to degenerate. Most military incursions in the political leadership in Nigeria were

not resisted by the church instead some church leaders described them as the act of God (Adiele, 1999).

Advocacy is one of the several approaches of the church in addressing political offences with a view to forestalling future occurrence. From time to time, the church should deploy delegations to visit the government or any organization which may have erred in one way or the other in order to make them accept their mistakes, especially where their actions have resulted to halt and to take liability for such offences. According to Ehianu (2007), it is better to prevent a crisis than to start looking for how to cure it. Regrettably, some church leaders have done more harm than good in the management and prevention of political violence. Rather than prevent crisis, some of them, through their action and teaching have promoted political hatred, discrimination and disaffection. Delivery of prophecies that are presumptuous and false has resulted to animosity and hatred.

A biblical foundation for the enthronement of free, fair and electoral justice can be derived from 2 Chronicles 19:4-8 which reads

Jehoshaphat dwelt at Jerusalem; and he went out again among the people, from Beer-sheba to the hill country of E'phraim, and brought them back to the LORD, the God of their fathers. He appointed judges in the land in all the fortified cities of Judah, city by city, and said to the judges, "Consider what you do, for you judge not for man but for the LORD; he is with you in giving judgment. Now then, let the fear of the LORD be upon you; take heed what you do, for there is no perversion of justice with the LORD our God, or partiality, or taking bribes." Moreover in Jerusalem Jehoshaphat appointed certain Levites and priests and heads of families of Israel, to give judgment for the LORD and to decide disputed cases. They had their seat at Jerusalem(RSV).

When Jehu, the son of Hanani, the Seer, who was also a prophet, rebuked King Jehoshaphet for his alliance with King Ahab of Israel, he responded by repenting. His relationship with the idolatrous Ahab had set a poor example for his subjects. There was a total collapse of the Justice System in Jerusalem as a result of imitation of the poor justice system in Israel. So the King went throughout his Kingdom to bring the people back to the LORD. He also established a judicial system that is in accordance with the Law of Moses.

Jehoshaphet emphasized the fact that the appointed judges were not judging for man but God. There is no judge who can genuinely dispense sound judgment without the fear of God. The judges were reminded that they were occupying their offices on behalf of God. As a result they should make sure that they abstain from injustice, partiality or bribery.

Some judges allow material things to influence their attitude and judgment. They accept bribe from their client in order to influence judgment. This amounts to gross misconduct. The words of king Jehoshaphet suffice for judicial officers in Nigeria. They should remember that they are judging for God and not for human being as a result they should exercise their offices with the fear of God. God hates injustice bribery and partiality. Another aspect of Jehoshaphet judicial reform is his instructions to the judges of Judah. "Judge carefully for with the LORD our God there is no injustice, partiality or bribery". Based on this, there should be a judicial reform that will ensure judges dispense judgment in accordance with the laws of the land. This will restore confidence in the judicial system in Nigeria as the judiciary is the hope of the common man.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

Electoral violence and malpractices are twin evils that have bedeviled the electoral process in Nigeria. Indeed, they are not recent development but have been with the elections in Nigeria since independence. There are so many reasons for these ugly developments which were adequately highlighted in this discuss. The most unfortunate thing is that Nigeria seems not to have learnt any lesson from her electoral experience over the years. Instead of reducing, the phenomena have continued to thrive and have taken a new dimension in the recent time.

The contributions of the church in responding to electoral offences and the consequences have been widely discussed in this paper. However, there were instances where some individual Christians and denominations were known to have contributed to electoral violence and other election-related offences. Although CAN remained the authentic body of Christians in Nigeria but there remains some deviant denominations and individuals who do not have regards for CAN. These groups of persons like to do things differently. Whatever happens, their actions do not negate the immense contribution of the cooperating Churches. With more efforts from the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), electoral justice and non-violence election will be achieved.

## Recommendations

1. Establishment of electoral offences commission which is to be headed by an experienced religious cleric especially a Christian leader such as Archbishop Onaiyekan, Most Rev'd. N. D. Okoh (rtd), Bishop Martin kukah and Rev'd. Dr. Israel Akanji. The commission will help in quick and steady dispensation of electoral offences
2. Electoral education should be massively carried out by the church. The church had stood aloof for a long time. It is time for every Christian to show keen interest in the process of choosing political leaders. To achieve this, electoral education is a sine-qua-non
3. Reformation of the electoral justice system is imperative. The current electoral justice system has some lacuna which politicians capitalize on to perpetuate electoral crimes. It allows any acclaimed winner to be sworn-in before the trial of electoral offences. A reform that will not allow swearing in of any winner until all the petitions arising from the conduct of the election are tried and judgment delivered.

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