

Internal Displacement and the Challenge of Election Conduct in Nigeria: A Study of the 2015 General Elections

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Abstract

Democracy has become the most accepted form of government in the world. The beauty of democracy has been on its inclusiveness in ensuring periodic change of government through free and fair elections. However, the conduct of election has faced numerous challenges, and of late, this has included internal displacement. In the case of Nigeria, 2015 was the first time it was confronted by a large-scale internal displacement in the conduct of its general election. It is against this background that this study investigated the impacts of internal displacement on the 2015 General Elections in Nigeria. This study took a critical look at how the electoral management body confronted this new challenge and the extent it ensured its inclusiveness. The study adopted a survey research, involving the use of primary data collection technique. By this, questionnaire was distributed to the IDPs in Durumi IDP camp, Abuja. Data analysis followed quantitative approach, while Social Dominance Theory propounded by Sidanius and Pratto was adopted as a theoretical prism. Following the research findings, the study concluded that INEC failed to ensure inclusiveness in the election process as most internally displaced persons who had already registered before their displacement were not allowed to vote in the 2015 general elections. The study recommended amongst others, a strong inclusive legislation on participation of IDPs across the country in order to prevent unjustifiable social dominance against some IDPs.

Keywords: Displacement, Election, Electoral Participation, Internal Displacement, Internal Displaced Persons, and Social Dominance.

Introduction

Human security is largely the central focus of government as it refers to the value of life of the people of a particular society. Anything that 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, sicknesses 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).

One of the significant symptoms of human insecurity crisis is internally displaced persons. As opined by the United Nations Guiding Principles, these are ‘persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border’ (Cited in Oladeji, 2015, p. 44). Internally displaced persons receive little or no attention from the government of their habitual residence. These persons leave their comfort for a life of uncertainty elsewhere which triggers insecurity from within them coupled with the minimal attention received from government thereby exposing these people to economic threats, health threats, personal threats, political threats, environmental threats and community threats. Great concerns have been generated by both local and international agencies due to the poor living conditions of these persons which in turn, leads to poor sanitation therefore a rise in sicknesses and diseases (Emmanuellar, 2015). Importantly, internally displaced persons become dependent on others for basic amenities either on the host community or external intervention (Brookings, 2008).

In Nigeria the activities of Boko Haram have led to internal displacement of good number of Nigerians. The Boko Haram crisis was on going amidst the preparation towards the 2015 general elections. Nigeria began 2015 facing highly polarizing - and potentially destabilizing - elections amid a dangerous territorial advance in the northeast by the violent Islamist insurgent group known as Boko Haram. According to Oladeji (2015), by some estimates, more than 5,500 people were killed in Boko Haram attacks in 2014, and Boko Haram attacks have already claimed hundreds of lives in early 2015. In total, the group may have killed more than 10,000 people since its emergence in the early 2009.

Nigeria experienced a new vista in its electoral history in the 2015 general elections as, for the first time, there was voting among the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Before this period, the country has never experienced prolonged displacement of the magnitude witnessed towards the build up to the 2015 general elections. Therefore, before 2015, IDP voting was alien to Nigeria’s political and electoral process. As 2015 drew closer, the voting rights of IDPs was elevated to the front burner of election discourse. This is because the insurgency in the north eastern part of the country has caused a large number of eligible voters to be displaced from their homes. Apart from the insurgency which was orchestrated by the Islamist militant group – Boko Haram – flooding, herdsman menace, inter-communal clashes fuelled by ethnic and religious tensions, especially in the Middle Belt region, and even elections, have also caused a lot of people to be displaced from their places of abode. As a result of this, many fled for safety to neighbouring states, there was high influx of IDPs to the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja. They formed IDP Camps and settlements which include Durumi and Kuje IDP Camps, Abuja. However, as the elections drew closer, there were concerns that good number of registered voters would be

disenfranchised, owing to the fact that they have been displaced from their homes/wards where they registered to vote. Thus, as arrangements were being put in place to ensure that the IDPs in the north-eastern part of the country were not disenfranchised, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) announced that registered voters fleeing their present abode to their States of origin for fear of outbreak of violence during and after the general elections would not be allowed to vote in their home States. This generated a lot of controversy, as some argued that by the definition of internally displaced persons, these categories of people qualify as IDPs, because they are persons or groups of persons that have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border.

This provided a situation where arrangement was made for some IDPs to exercise their franchise and some were denied such rights. According to INEC, such people who registered and have obtained their Permanent Voters Cards (PVCs) in one part of the country but have fled to another could only go back to where they were registered if they wished to vote. By this, those in question feared that there could be a repeat of the painful experience of the post-election violence of 2011. This fear was exacerbated by the threats being issued during the campaigns.

The research problem of this study lies in the disturbing increase number of internally displaced persons in Nigeria especially towards the 2015 elections. The Boko Haram sect intensified their fight during the build up towards the 2015 general elections which caused much internal displacement. Apart from the activities of Boko Haram, natural disaster like flood, also the activities of bandits led to the unprecedented increase of Internally Displaced Persons. IDP Camps in the country ran into hundreds of thousands and millions. There was massive influx of IDPs in Abuja, as large number established camps in Durumi and Kuje areas of Abuja. Majority of those displaced persons were eligible voters with Permanent Voters Cards who could no longer exercise their franchise. With the large number of displaced voters, the country was thrown into debate and controversy on whether to make provisions for them to vote, or which category of displaced voters should be enabled to vote. An attempt by the National Assembly to legislate on this proved abortive, leaving INEC to make executive decisions amidst duress. As a result, internal displacement made the 2015 general election to be beclouded by controversy. Such scenario is alien to Nigerian electoral system, and at the same time the issue of internal displacement is becoming phenomenal. Against this challenge, this study examined the implications of the internal displacement on elections with reference to the 2015 general elections focusing on Durumi and Kuje IDP Camps, Abuja.

In line with the background and problem of this study, the following objectives are to be achieved:

- i. To assess the impact of internal displacement on the 2015 general elections in Nigeria.
- ii. To identify the extent to which internal displacement affected the voting rights of the IDPs.
- iii. To ascertain ways through which the franchise of internally displaced persons can be sustained.

Considering these challenges, the study investigated the following:

- i. How has internal displacement impacted on the 2015 general elections in Nigeria?
- ii. To what extent did internal displacement affect the voting right of internal displaced persons?
- iii. How can the franchise of internally displaced persons be sustained?

Conceptual Review

Internal Displaced Persons (IDPs)

The most commonly used definition of IDPs is premised on the United Nation's (UN) Guiding Principles on Internally Displacement. The Guiding Principles define IDPs as "Persons or group of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residences in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violation of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border (cited in Iheme, 2014). Iheme argued that the issue of displacement has become phenomenon, especially considering the rate at which it is spreading. He further maintains that Victims of man-made or natural disasters become IDPs when they no longer live within their residential homes but remain within home country's territory. Internally displaced persons are victims of various kinds of injustices or violent confrontations perpetrated by either their own government against them or by others, such as communal clashes, riots, religious conflicts, terrorism, natural disasters and so on. On the other hand, it is most painful when people are rendered internally displaced due to failure of security operatives to deter an impending attack.

Election

Many political scholars have viewed the concept of election from different dimensions. Some have equally seen election as a form of political participation which is very pivotal in the practice of democracy and also has the capacity to disrupt democracy and unity of a nation. There may not be doubt about this fact, because in Nigeria people mainly and generally participate in politics during election period. Shashi (2007) has seen election as the process by which public or private officials are selected from a field of candidates by the making of ballots in a vote. He maintains that in politics, the act of choosing a representative or the holder of a particular office is usually by ballot. This assertion shows a representative form of governance in action, which is part of Nigerian political system. In this representative political practice, the people have the right to decide who represents

them. This is in line with the position of Nnanabu (2011) who held that election is an inalienable right of the citizenry to elect their leaders according to the constitution provision of country. For Nnanabu, election is the mandate of the people according to the principle of democracy to vote into power the candidates of their choice. Nnanabu maintains that election is an instrument of power transferred to the people's-oriented government, and the means of achieving democracy is through election. Nnanabu argued that a true democracy cannot be actualized without a viable electoral process which is the authentic and effective means of achieving a virile and uninterrupted democracy, therefore, election is an instrument used in a democratic dispensation for elective position. This assertion presents the legal aspect of election, where it is made clear as the constitutional right of the citizens.

Electoral Participation

Electoral participation varies in intensity from one individual or group to another. At the highest level of intensity, electoral participation could be active; at the low level, it could be passive, even to the point of apathy (withdrawal), which could be determined by the level of political tolerance within the environment (Unanka, 2004). For Unanka, active electoral participation is the kind engaged in both by the political elites and non-elites (the politicians and a select part of masses). The non-elite politicians are people who are not quite accurately called the decision-makers and implementers, but who as members of political parties and pressure groups can contest elections as candidates and vie for political leadership or can significantly influence government decisions. The active masses include those who do not necessarily belong to any political party or pressure group and cannot contest any election for any public office, but who ordinarily can influence governmental decisions, where necessary, by resorting to protest, all these are done in the environment of political tolerance.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical Framework serves as a prism through which a concept, idea or phenomenon is explained, analysed and understood. Therefore, a theoretical framework is of much relevant to a study of this nature. It is against this background that the theory of Social Dominance is adopted. The theory was first formulated by Sidanius and Pratto (1989) in their book, *Social Dominance: An Intergroup Theory of Social Hierarchy and Oppression*.

The key propositions of the social dominance theory include:

- i. Individuals are stratified by age, sex and group. Group identification is based on ethnicity, religion, nationality.
- ii. Human social hierarchy consists of a hegemonic group at the top and negative reference groups at the bottom.
- iii. As role gets more powerful, the probability it is occupied by a hegemonic group increase (law of increasing proportion).

- iv. Racism, sexism, nationalism, geographical location and classism are all manifestations of this same principle of social hierarchy.

Following the propositions, social dominance is a theory of inter-group relations that focuses on the maintenance and stability of group-based social hierarchies. According to the theory, group-based inequalities are maintained through three primary inter-group behaviours – institutional discrimination, aggregated individual discrimination, and behavioural asymmetry.

The theory proposes that widely shared cultural ideologies, that is, legitimizing myths, provide the moral and intellectual justification for these intergroup behaviours. The theory begins with the observation that human social groups tend to be organized according to group-based social hierarchies in societies. These hierarchies have a trimorphic (3-form) structure based on (1) age (adults have more power and higher status than children); (2) gender (men have more power and higher status than women); and (3) arbitrary-set, which are group-based hierarchies that are culturally defined and do not necessarily exist in all societies. It is this arbitrary-set hierarchy aspect that this study adopted in its analysis.

Arbitrary-set hierarchies can be based on ethnicity (for example, Whites over Blacks and vice versa); religion (Christians over Muslims, and vice versa); nationality (Yorubas over Hausa/ Fulani, and vice versa) and geographical locations (North and South, North West, North East, North Central, South East, South West and South South) etc. Human social hierarchies consist of a hegemonic group at the top and negative reference groups at the bottom. More powerful social/political roles are increasingly likely to be occupied by a hegemonic group, than the dominated group, and this domination is justified by legitimizing myths. Legitimizing myths are beliefs justifying social dominance, such as sacred myths (for example, the divine right of kings, or the born-to-rule mentality of one ethnic group over others).

The 2015 Nigeria General Elections witnessed the adoption of voting modality by INEC to provide the necessary conditions for only the IDPs resident in the North East Camps to vote, against other IDP camps located in other parts of the country. This also includes the IDPs who are from North East but residing outside the IDP camps in North East.

This policy by INEC generated a lot of controversy during the 2015 general elections, accusing INEC of arbitrary set-hierarchy which involves protecting and preferring a set of IDP extract against the others, and discrimination based on geographical location which is in line with the highlights of the theory. This theory captures and explains the behaviour of INEC in enabling the IDPs to participate in the 2015 general elections, and further limited it to only IDPs residing in the North East, and making it easier for them by providing modalities which include: change in residency requirement for IDPs; mass transfers of the registration of identified IDPs to their new locations; creation of special

voting centres for IDPs in the north east; and distribution of outstanding PVCs to IDPs in their camps before the election.

In giving special consideration to the IDPs resident in the North East, INEC through its administrative mechanisms granted a waiver to areas of the Electoral Act that could impede these categories of IDPs from participating. This include: waiver on mass transfer of the registration of identified voters to new locations, late redistribution of outstanding PVCs to IDPs in their camps. The theory identifies the action of INEC in considering only the IDPs resident in IDP Camps in the north east in the 2015 general elections as arbitrary-set hierarchy on geographical location.

Internal Displaced Persons and the 2015 General Elections

As the 2015 general elections drew near, voting rights of IDPs was elevated to the front burner of electoral discourse. This is because the insurgency in the north eastern part of the country had caused a large number of eligible voters to be displaced from their homes. Apart from the insurgency which was orchestrated by the Islamist militant group – Boko Haram – flooding, herdsmen menace, inter-communal clashes fuelled by ethnic and religious tensions, especially in the Middle Belt region. Elections have equally made people to be internally displaced. Therefore, as the elections drew closer, there were concerns that a good number of registered voters would be disenfranchised, owing to the fact that they have been displaced from their homes/wards where they registered. Ibeanu (2015, p.20) succinctly captured it thus:

...By mid-2014 the Boko Haram insurgency in the North East seemed to be rising at tremendous rate, displacing in its wake hundreds of Thousands of eligible voters. There were repeated questions put to Chairman Jega by stakeholders, particularly development partners, regarding INEC's plans for IDP voting. Professor Jega's position was consistently that INEC was committed to an inclusive electoral process and therefore would do everything it could to provide opportunities for every qualified Nigerian to vote. In essence, INEC was committed to IDP voting but the realities of organizing the complex processes it would entail will determine if it would be done in 2015 or later. The Governorship by-election in Adamawa State...brought the full magnitude of the IDP challenge in the electoral process to the attention of the Commission for the first time. This is because it was the first time a state wide election would take place in any of the three main insurgency States...The large numbers of IDPs in the holding camps and stories of many others spontaneously settled with families and friends convinced INEC of the need to urgently respond to the situation. Although the Adamawa by-election was later cancelled...the Chairman of INEC and his team were convinced that the Commission would have to respond to requests for IDP voting sooner than later.

Meanwhile, in Nigeria, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, IDMC (2016) estimated that there were almost 2,152,000 IDPs in the country as of December 31, 2015. This figure is based on an assessment conducted from November to December 2015 by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) team in 207 Local Government Areas covering 13 States in northern Nigeria (Abuja, Adamawa, Bauchi, Benue, Borno, Gombe, Kaduna, Kano, Nasarawa, Plateau, Taraba, Yobe, and Zamfara). According to the same IDMC report, of the total figure of IDPs, 12.6% were displaced due to communal clashes, 2.4% by natural disasters, and 85% as a result of insurgency attacks by the Islamist Boko Haram.

The debate on whether the IDPs would vote in the 2015 general elections or if they had been disenfranchised as a result of having been displaced from where they registered to vote got the attention of the National Assembly, as the Senate, in particular, considered an amendment to the Electoral Act 2010 (as amended) to make provision for the IDPs to vote in their respective camps nationwide through a proposed insertion of Section 42 (2) into the Act. However, the Bill was later stalled at its second reading in December 2014 as the Senate was of the view that a resolution employing the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to use all administrative mechanisms within the Electoral Act to ensure that IDPs of adult age exercise their franchise in time of general elections would be more effective (PLAC Newsletter, February 2015). Hence, on 16 December, 2014, Senate directed its Committee on INEC to liaise with INEC to establish special polling units for IDPs victims of insurgency in the north east (Cleen Foundation, 2014). Consequently, INEC raised a Task Force on how to get the IDPs to vote during the elections. The establishment of the Task Force was a fallout or outcome of a workshop and a technical brainstorming by the Chairman's office, as well as a one-day stakeholders' conference on IDP voting also organized by the Chairman's office. One important recommendation of the Task Force was that special centers should be set up for the IDPs in the north east to vote.

Thus, as arrangements were being put in place to ensure that the IDPs in the north-eastern part of the country were not disenfranchised, INEC announced that registered voters fleeing their present abode to their States of origin for fear of outbreak of violence during and after the general elections would not be allowed to vote in their home States (Nweje, 2015). This is the problem. By the definition of internally displaced persons, these categories of people qualify as IDPs, because they are persons or groups of persons that have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border (www.internaldisplacement.org). Why then was arrangement made for some IDPs to exercise their franchise and some were denied such rights? According to INEC, such people who registered and have obtained their Permanent Voters Cards (PVCs) in one part of the country but have fled to another

could only go back to where they were registered if they wished to vote. Those in question feared that there could be a repeat of the painful experience of the post-election violence of 2011. This fear was exacerbated by the threats being issued during the campaigns, which was characterized by political intolerance, campaign of calumny and hate.

Research Method

This study adopted survey design as it was quantitatively inclined. Data were collected through the administration of questionnaire. The study was designed to investigate the impacts of internal displacement in the conduct of elections and by carrying out empirical inquiry into the 2015 Nigerian general elections, using the case of Durumi IDP Camp, Abuja. Considering the population of IDPs in Durumi IDP camp, four hundred (400) copies of the questionnaire were administered, while three hundred seven (307) were successfully retrieved amidst some limitations. Data collected were presented in a tabular form and quantitatively analysed using simple percentage statistical tool.

Result of the Findings

The following are data collected in line with the research questions.

Table 1 The impact of internal displacement on the 2015 general elections in Nigeria

Response	Frequency	Percentage
High	83	27.0%
Very High	212	69.1%
Low	7	2.3%
Very Low	5	1.6%
Total	307	100%

Source: Field survey June, 2020

The nature or type of impact internal displacement has on general elections in Nigeria is important to be ascertained in this study. The frequency distribution table above shows that 83 respondents of the total respondents which 27.0% are of the view that the negative impact of internal displacement on general elections is “High”. The table further shows that 212 of total respondents constituting 69.1% which is the highest number affirm that the impact of internal displacement on general election is “very high”, while 7 respondents of 2.3% are of the view “low” impact, and 5 respondents of 1.6% hold that the impact is “very low”.

Table 2 The extent of effect of Internal displacement on the voting right of IDPs

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
High	78	25.4%
Very High	203	66.1%
Low	21	6.8%
Very Low	5	1.6%
Total	307	100%

Source: Field survey June, 2020

The above distribution table ascertains the views of respondents on the extent at which internal displacement affected the voting right of the IDPs in Nigeria. This table is very key to this study since it provides answers to one of the major questions of the paper and also showing the nexus between electoral violence and the conduct of general elections. The above distribution shows that 78 of the total respondents which constitute 25.4% are of the view that the level at which internal displacement affected IDPs is “high”. The table further indicates that 203 respondents which is the highest number of respondents constituting 66.1% of the entire sample of the population are of the opinion that the extent is “very high”. Meanwhile, 21 respondents of 6.8% maintained that the extent is “low” while 5 respondents of 1.6% hold that the extent is “very low”.

Table 3. Sustenance of franchise of internal displaced persons

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Through Adequate Security	83	27.0%
Through Strong and Inclusive Legislation	212	69.1%
Creating Voting centres in all IDP Camps	7	2.3%
Immediate Reintegration	5	1.6%
Total	307	100%

Source: Field survey June, 2020

The study considers it important to through field survey ascertain how the franchise of IDPs can be sustained even in the light of increase internal displacement. The frequency distribution table above shows that 83 respondents of the total respondents which 27.0% are of the view that the franchise can be sustained through adequate security. The table further shows that 212 of total respondents constituting 69.1% which is the highest number affirm that the franchise can be sustained through strong and inclusive legislation, while 7 respondents of 2.3% are of the view creating voting centres in all IDP Camps, and 5 respondents of 1.6% hold that it is through immediate reintegration.

Discussion of Results

The Simple Percentage Statistical tool used in presenting and analyzing data collected in this study shows that, Research Question One is very relevant; and Internal Displacement strongly impacted negatively on the 2015 general elections in Nigeria as it resulted to disfranchisement of majority of registered IDP voters as they were denied of voting. This is evident as majority of the respondents identified ‘very high’ which explains the injustice on registered IDP voters located in other camps outside north east. This reveals the level of inclusiveness in the country’s electoral process. This finding entirely negates the claims by the electoral management body as was seen in the literature reviewed above.

The findings also show that Research Question Two is relevant; and that to a great extent internal displacement affected the voting rights of IDPs in the 2015 general elections in Nigeria. It shows the need to design a framework to enable the internally displaced persons exercise their voting right, hence the issue of displacement has become phenomenon.

The study findings indicate that Research Question Three is valid; and majority of the respondents suggested that the franchise of internally displaced persons can be sustained through strong and inclusive legislation, this is important as the issue of displacement has become phenomenon which is in line with the argument of Itheme (2014) as reviewed in the literature.

Conclusion

This study has examined internal displacement and the challenge of election conduct in Nigeria using the case of 2015 General Elections. The findings of the study have revealed significant relationship between Internal Displacement and the conduct of Elections. The study identified the negative impact of Internal Displacement on elections as it limited the inclusiveness of election, thereby putting the inclusiveness of election process in Nigeria into question. Also, to a great extent, internal displacement affected the voting rights of the IDPs and further identified ways through such challenge can be averted, and in turn improve and sustain the voting rights of the IDPs. The study has concluded that internal displacement leads to denial of franchise, especially in a democratic society where there is no existing inclusive legislation on the citizens under internal displacement.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study. the following recommendations are made;

- i. There is need to enact strong legislation on participation of all registered IDPs across the country in general elections. This will prevent discrimination by Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to favour some sections of registered IDP voters that participate in elections.
- ii. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should through its administrative powers create and establish voting centers in all IDP camps across the country. This will enable the internally displaced persons who are registered voters to actively exercise their franchise conveniently. iii. Adequate security should be provided for the IDPs in camps across the country. This will ensure some level of confidence and encourage registered IDPs to exercise their franchise.
- iii. Effective political education should be carried out by all election stakeholders, including INEC, Political Parties, Politicians, Electoral Observer bodies, Civil Society Groups and Government. This will help to enlighten the IDPs politically, and also help them to effectively exercise their franchise.

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