

Campaigns and Electioneering: Reflecting on the 2015 General Elections in Nigeria *

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Abstract

Historically, campaigns are recognized as vital part of electioneering. This is because the message sent across to the electorate during campaign contains the ideas that the candidate wants to share with the voters. This is specifically aimed at getting those who agree with their ideas to support them when running for a political position. The message often consists of several talking points about policy issues. The points summarize the main ideas of the campaign and are repeated frequently in order to create a lasting impression with the voters. However, a study of the situation in Nigeria, with specific reference to the 2015 Campaigns and Electioneering, revealed the contrary with hate speeches as the main theme. Data obtained from primary and secondary sources were deployed to carry out the study with an analytical and narrative historical method. Findings indicate that unlike what is obtainable in other parts of the world where democracy is practiced, with policy issues forming the backbone of campaign message, the Nigerian situation was basically on persons, character assassination, violence and abuses (hate) speeches. The paper argues that this campaign strategy often leads to electoral violence before, during and after elections. The paper therefore concludes that only campaigns that are issue based can guarantee peaceful and credible elections in Nigeria.

Keywords: Campaign, Electioneering, Nigeria, Elections, Democracy.

Introduction

Election is a very important to the principle and practices of democracy all over the world. This becomes even clearer when seen in the light of the fact that with the collapse of primordial traditional system and the emergence of modern state and the major advancement made in terms of the popular will as the source of sovereignty, as opposed to the whims and caprices of rulers, election has offered a way through which the people exercise their right to determine those they intend entrusting with the mantle of leadership. It is in the light of the above that experts argue that elections could be best considered as one procedure of aggregating preferences of a particular kind, as it offers choice to the electorates who can chose between two or several alternatives. Similarly, election confers a whole lot of legitimacy on those elected, as such process of political recruitment reflects the wishes and aspirations of the people. In addition to choice, which is an essential ingredient of democracy, election promotes accountability, in the sense that the threat to defeat at the polls exerts pressure on those in power to conduct them in a

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responsible manner and to take account of popular interests and wishes in their decision (Egwu S, 2003)

In the case of Nigeria (as in most developing countries of the world), over the years, political contestations between various social classes and stakeholders have revolved round some fundamental issues which no doubt, have been defining variables of the nation's electoral process and in fact politics. These issues with particular reference to hate speech campaign and electoral violence have provided the context and background for the way and manner elections are conducted in the country. They are also responsible for the way and manner the game of politics is played by political and social classes in the country. More importantly, these issues are critical to the understanding of the trials and tribulations as well as prospects of the future of democracy in Nigeria.

Campaign and Electoral Violence: Interrogating the Nexus

Generally, political campaigns are an organized effort which seeks to influence the decision-making process within a specific group or environment. This is because it provides that mobilization of forces either by an organization or individuals to influence others in order to effect an identified and desired political change. The import of this is that it shows people and particularly, political candidates' ability to sensitize the political community in relation to making the community considers them as potentials and better representatives of the people (Lynn, 2009).

A critical analysis of the above shows that for a political campaign to be able to act effectively and efficiently as the mobilization force that will eventually influence the decision of the people, the message contained in the campaign must be convincing and attainable. It is in line with this that the paper aligns with Lynn (2009), when he opined thus:

... What seems to be very important in any political campaign is the 'message' that is sent to the electorates. A campaign message is an important and potent tool that politicians use to express views and feelings to the public with the intention of reshaping and redirecting the electorates' opinions to align with theirs. The message should be a simple statement that can be repeated severally throughout the campaign period to persuade the target audience or influence voters' act in the candidates' favour. The campaign message ought to contain the salient ingredients that the candidate wishes to share with the voters and these must be repeated often in order to create a lasting impression on the voters. As a matter of fact, good campaigners prefer to keep the message broad to attract the voters. In other words, appropriate use of language calls for the proper identification of the kinds of electorates targeted for mobilisation during or after a political campaign.

Having the above as standard, scholars have argued that political campaigns in Nigeria, especially during campaigns have deviated from the original norm. This is because instead of the political actors sensitizing the political community in relation to making the community considers them as potentials and better representatives of the people, they engage more in hate speeches. Thus in the nation's political arena, hate speech is fast becoming so pervasive that it is doubtful if there are many Nigerians that are completely free from the vice. This in the thinking of this school of thought is that people who usually complain of being insulted by other ethnic groups often use even more hateful words in describing the groups they feel have insulted them. The outcome of this exercise is that at the end of the day, there exist the widening of the social distance among the different ethnicities that make up the country and an exacerbation of the crisis in the country's nation-building. It is in line with this that, Adibe J (2015) defined and described Hate speech thus:

Speech that employs discriminatory epithets to insult and stigmatize others on the basis of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or other forms of group membership. It is any speech, gesture, conduct, writing or display which could incite people to violence or prejudicial action. There are individuals and groups in this country who openly relish the freedom to rain insults and profile others by appropriating to themselves the role of ethnic and religious champions. The problem is that hate speech is often the gateway to discrimination, harassment and violence as well as a precursor to serious harmful criminal acts. It is doubtful if there will be hate-motivated violent attacks on any group without hate speech and the hatred it purveys.

In a more elaborate term, Kukah H (2015) describes "hate speech as communication that denigrates a particular person or a group on the basis of race, color, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, or other characteristic. It can be in the form of any speech, gesture or conduct, writing, or display and usually marks incitement, violence or prejudice against an individual or a group".

Kukah H (2015) continued thus:

The Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe issued in 1997 covers the internationally accepted definition of the term. Accordingly, "the term "hate speech" shall be understood as covering all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance." As a result it generates stigmas, stereotypes, prejudices and discriminatory practices against those who are constructed as being different".

Substantively, dangerous/hate speech in the Nigerian context is a speech acts that:

- Insults people for their religion
- Abuses people for their ethnic or linguistic affiliation
- Expresses contempt against people because of their place of origin
- Disparages or intimidates women or girls because of their gender
- Condone discriminatory assertions against people living with disability
- Abuses or desecrates symbols of cultural or religious practices
- Denigrates or otherwise ridicules traditional or cultural institutions of other people
- Deliberately spread falsehood or rumours that demeans or maligns or otherwise ostracizes other people on the basis of religion, ethnicity, gender or place of origin for the accident of one form of disability or the other (Umar, 2015)

Although, this is fast becoming the norm in Nigeria, however, the International Law and national legal frameworks both prohibit such speech. For instance, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) states that any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law. The Article 4 of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), also provides for states to declare an offence punishable by law “all dissemination of ideas based on racial superiority or hatred, incitement to racial discrimination acts of violence or incitement to such acts against any race or group of persons of another colour or ethnic origin” (Agrinya-Owan C and Mordi R, 2015).

In his analysis, Jega A (2007) argued that there is strong relationship between campaign of calumny (hate speech) and electoral violence, and that as far as history is concerned, elements of this have often characterized elections in Nigeria. He painted a graphic picture of this thus:

Elections in Nigeria have historically been conflict ridden. The campaigns preceding elections are invariably marked by pettiness, intolerance and violence...including abduction and assassinations. And elections and their outcomes have often been neither free nor fair' characterized by violations of the process (both inadvertently and willful), corrupt conduct by officials, rigging of results and so on.

Emphasizing the above, Abbas.I.M (2007), opined thus:

With unprecedented political thuggery and uncontrollable violence characterized by wanton destruction of lives and property, election period in Nigeria is best described as warfare...incidence of intra party and inter-party conflicts and violence have led to endemic abductions and assassinations of opponents and innocent victims, flagrant and official rigging of election results. Further violations of established process have invariably transformed election periods in Nigeria to a matter-of-do-or-die or a matter-of-life-and-

death...or that of hook or crook...this electoral politics has, of course signaled serious dangers for democratic and partisan politics in Nigeria.

From the above, it is clear that the relationship between hate speech and electoral violence is a strong one and has been largely responsible for post electoral destructions in most parts of the world especially in the Third World countries, where the hold-on-to-power at all cost syndrome is strong.

Hate Speech Campaign in Politics: Rwanda and Kenya Examples

Research have shown that in most countries where the people and their political class have not been able to curtail the use of hate speeches in campaign and political activities, the end have always been disastrous. This is because most often, those seeking certain political powers have been reckless in the use of language so much so that (knowingly or unknowingly), they denigrate a particular person or a group on the basis of race, colour, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, or other characteristic. This was the case in Kenya and Rwanda. In the case of Rwanda, it is indeed unfortunate as the people before this period had maintained good neighbourliness.

Available historical evidence has shown that the Hutus and Tutsis share much in common. In fact not many factors divide the two peoples; even language did not divide Hutus and Tutsis whether in Rwanda or Burundi. Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda both speak Kinyarwanda, which is closely related to the language spoken by the Tutsi and Hutu of Burundi, namely Kirundi. Other aspects of culture such as religious traditions, dance and music, are also shared by the two groups and were governed for centuries by the same aristocracy. Unfortunately, due to political manipulation and hate speeches, by the second half of the twentieth century, Rwanda and Burundi have shared a history of communal conflict which has resulted in death and internal and external refugee flows on massive scale (Abdalla A nd, Zeleza, P.T,1997)

Describing the form and nature the genocide in Rwanda took, Abubakar, S (1999), posited thus:

The Rwandan genocide brings this out clearly. Although the world was rudely awoken only in April, 1994, by the badly mutilated and bloated bodies of hundreds of thousands of the massacred Tutsis floating in Lake Victoria, and the gory pictures beamed to it by television, of Tutsis being subjected to the most inhuman torture to death by the militia group Interhamwe ("those who attack together") and Impuzamugambi ("those who only have one aim"), the killings were not spontaneous. They were well planned by "groups of

*extremists at the heart of government, all of them members of the President's entourage, and many of them related to the President," using the resources of the state. There were even dress rehearsals between 1991 and 1994. Before the April 1994 genocide, which claimed over 800,000 lives, unpunished massacre of Tutsis was becoming a frequent occurrence since 1991."between 1991 and 1994, alarm bells were ringing and signs were there to be read, in the form of massacres that went unpunished". Not even the reports by the U.N Human Rights Commission were heeded. This may have encouraged the Habyarimana regime to press ahead with its ruthless plan for genocide. Thus, in September 1992, the regime defined who the enemies and friends of the Hutus were. The enemies were, The enemies within were, "anybody who gives any kind of support to the main enemy." **The media which was ,controlled by Hutu extremists constantly called the Tutsis (Iwenzi" meaning, "the cockroaches that have to be crushed" They were presented as a "minority, well - off and foreign."** And, as is usual with organisers of genocide their media organs are also used to attack the "enemies from within." Thus, one particular newspaper *Le Courier du Peuple* kept on pouring venom on Hutu liberals and opposition. Such was the level of propaganda that, what had become almost unthinkable since the Second World War, happened in Rwanda.*

In the case of Kenya, it has been established that the disputed 2007 Presidential election in Kenya resulted in an outbreak of post-election violence that left over 1,000 people dead and over 600,000 people displaced. The post-election enquiries concluded that hate speech and incitement to violence was widespread on the campaign trail and in the mainstream media, exploiting tensions between ethnic communities (or 'tribes'). In the years since the 2007 elections, a few politicians were arrested for engaging in hate speech and inciting violence (CRHS, 2013). In 2009, political candidates Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto (President of Kenya and Deputy President respectively), were indicted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for crimes against humanity for their alleged part in orchestrating the 2007 post-election violence. Investigations established that hate speech was also disseminated via SMS messages on mobile phones. Hate speech on native language which were also relayed on radio stations and online fanned ethnic tensions. Examples of some of the messages contained in the hate speeches during the 2007/2008 election are:

"Fellow Kenyans, the Kikuyus [Kenyan tribe] have stolen our children's future. Hope of removing them through the ballot has been stolen. We must deal with them the way they understand, violence. We must dominate them."

and

"We say no more innocent Kikuyu blood will be shed. We will slaughter them right here in the capital city. For justice, compile a list of Luos and Kalus(ph) [ethnic communities] you know at work or in your estates, or elsewhere in Nairobi, plus

where and how their children go to school. We will give you numbers to text this information.” (CRHS, 2013)

In the case of Ivory Coast, in the aftermath of the lost election, the incumbent president Laurent Gbagbo refused to accept his defeat. Along with his wife, Simone Gbagbo, he organised parallel State’s structures, attempted to censor the media and reinforced his hate speech against ethnicities living in the North of the country heightened that level of attack and destruction in the land. At the end of the day, over 3 000 deaths were recorded, while thousands of hundreds of refugees from the country were scattered all over West Africa Laurent. Gbagbo’s wife (Simeone) was jailed for 20 years for the inflammatory statements she made in the post-violence of the election 2011 in Ivory Coast.

In a nutshell, the above give a clear detail of the situation the people of Rwanda, Kenya and Ivory Coast found themselves as recently as the 1990’s and 2000’s, a circle the people have not been able to get out of.

Campaign of Hate Speech and the dance of Destruction

Drawing from the lessons of Rwanda, scholars have argued that in the history of the country’s political campaigns, the 2015 General elections may win the laurel of being one that recorded more campaign of calumny and character assassination, so much so that it almost turned the country’s political arena into a theatre of hate speeches and campaigns coloured in a form that defies logic and common sense. In a more specific term, Kukah H (2015) opined thus:

*The 2015 General elections have been turned into a theatre of hate speeches and campaigns coloured in a form that defies logic and common sense. Various politically motivated hate speeches about various candidates and especially the two leading Presidential candidates of All Progressives Congress and Peoples Democratic Party have been bandied. I am sure if experts should collate analyses of contents of the social media this year, Nigeria will rank top because arguably more than 40 million young Nigerians who have since graduated and have no means of livelihood have found solace in the various social media platforms and are busy churning out divergent messages. The use of **HATE SPEECHES** in Nigeria preparatory to the coming general elections has become notorious to an extent that you would think and feel that sooner rather than later Nigeria may witness genocidal killings similar to what occurred in Rwanda some few years back between the Hutus and Tutsis.*

A careful analysis of the Ahmed Lemu’s Panel Report on the 2011 post election violence in Nigeria shows that hate speech played a major role in inciting people against one another. According to the report, as a result of this, more than 1000 persons were killed across the

country with Kaduna State having the highest casualties of about 847 during the post election violence of 2011

2015 Campaign of Calumny: PDP and the APC War of Words

As the stage became set for the 2015 General Elections and the actors of the major parties became sure of the flag bearers, hate speeches fast assumed a common place in the various campaigns. During this period, hardly could one hear a politicians or group of politicians address issues without using abusive expressions, especially during political rallies which became avenues for raining hate speeches. In some other instances, contestants from even the same religious group, openly incited her members against others. Same was the case even among people that professed the same faith but different denominations. In some other instances, ethnic groups were freely denigrated. To illustrate this, there is the need to examine some cases during the Presidential rallies during the period under study. These include

- Ayo Fayose placed Obituary adverts on Buhari in some national dailies.
- Patience Jonathan called him (Buhari) dead brain.
- Femi Fani Kayode called Buhari low intellect.
- Doyin Okupe was extremely personal and abusive.
- Namadi urged northern Muslims not to vote Buhari, be associate with Christians
- Osinbanjo was alleged to have over 5000 Churches by Arch. Namadi Sambo
- AIT and NTA aired all sort of negative documentaries, some half-truth, some doctored. NBC rules were disobeyed.

Also Fayose took his smear campaign a notch higher when he implied that Buhari, who was around the same age with his mother, wears baby ‘pampers’ as he no longer has control of his body system. On the other hand, Fani-Kayode (the Director, Media and Publicity of the PDP Presidential Campaign Organization) alleged that the APC flag bearer was receiving funding from terrorist groups including the Boko Haram and ISIS. It is important to note that the APC also claimed the PDP-led government had security men specially trained as snipers to eliminate those opposed to President Goodluck Jonathan’s re-election bid, while Ejike Mbaka, a Catholic reverend father based in Enugu, during a church service on Sunday, March 15, 2015 alleged that President Goodluck Jonathan and his wife were planning to kill him over his criticism of the federal government and for his opposition to the president’s re-election. On the other hand, the Vice President tried to use religious sentiments in his attempt to divide the country and incite

Muslims against Christians. He specifically stated that "Buhari ya dauko pastor a matsayin mataimakinsa kun san coci nawa yake dashi? Yana da coci 5000, don haka karku zabe su." (The translation is - "Buhari has selected a pastor as his running mate, do you know how many churches he has? He has 5000 churches, so based on that, don't vote for them").

The party through the Vice President made it clear that the ruling party was the most Islamic Party in Nigeria because nobody can be more Muslim than himself, arguing that his name is Namadi which is a derivative of Namadina, meaning someone from the Medina in Saudi Arabia. At the Rally in Jigawa State Sambo also stated that he goes for the Hajj every year.

Coincidentally, as all these were being displayed, the people were getting confused and panicking. In some cases, people started to move away from areas where they had lived all their lives, but now felt was unsafe for them. On the other hand thugs and other miscreants were warming up to take advantage of the situation. It was therefore not surprising that different groups (under different names) began to emerge in the name of preparing to protect their own when the chips are down.

The Nigerian Media: Guardian of or Dagger on Democracy

In civilized nations of the world, during elections, the media plays the role of effective management of reportage as a way of maintaining peace and stability. However, in the developing world, the role played by the media has not help matters. This was the case up to the eve of the 2015 Presidential Election, which has made scholars to question the assumption that the media should act to protect democracy. Much earlier, Mu'azu (2003), had argued thus;

In the era of politics, assumption is that the media would serve as platform not only for the provision of information to the citizenry, but also as important instruments in the mobilization of the people and providing civic education for them to play their role in the democratic process. There is a desire to create a discerning and critical electorate. One of the goals of this political education is to provide a convivial environment for the choice of political leaders through elections with rancor and violence, make peaceful legitimate demands on political leaders, tolerate and accommodate dissenting or opposing political opinions. The public is expected to see through the exploitation of primordial loyalties including acts of thuggery at the expense of issues in the drive to capture political power. Expectedly, the people are to resist being drawn into acts of violence and blind support for political parties and politicians. The media are therefore required to become agents and promoters of peace to the electorate so that they can make informed political choice and take control of their political destiny. There is an expectation that this would contribute to the sustenance of democracy in Nigeria

It was rather unfortunate that the media continued to play the role of the devil's advocate as they became alarmists and instruments of destruction in the hands of the politicians. At a time, a wealthy owner of popular media outfit was even made the head of campaign team of a party. In this way, it was expected that he put into effective and efficient use his media outfit for the party. For example, it was noted during this period that while the Imo Broadcasting Corporation was used by some politicians to systematically, ceaselessly portray Jonathan as a hater of the Igbo so that General Buhari will be seen as a better alternative, the Africa Independent Television and Nigerian Television Authority were employed to aired damaging documentaries on Buhari. As systematic as the orchestrated campaigns were designed, clothed and executed in languages that could enrage the people against Jonathan and Buhari, the operator of these media outfits were smiling to the banks. Madukwem S (2015), particularly noted the situation thus:

It is worthy of note that some campaigns have been in tandem with specification of the National Broadcasting Commission, NBC. Others have degenerated into campaigns of blackmail, falsehood, character assassination, distortion of facts and figures and outright deviation from discipline, decorum, decency and tolerance. The essence of all these campaigns which climaxed to conclusion is to market the various candidates. But the choice of candidate must be dependent on truth, facts about such candidate. Nigerians are intelligent enough not to be hoodwinked; those whose credibility, image and ability are shrouded in doubt should not be voted into power, notwithstanding what such a candidate must have spent. Unfortunately, while some media houses have failed in the task of maintaining neutrality, others have allowed their platforms to be used by over-zealous politicians, whose only stock in trade is to impose candidates, heat up the polity and preach hate in the news, programmes and jingles

The immediate effect was that groups were turned against each other, while the lives of the employees of such outfits were at risk. For example, it was alleged that members of the opposition party had to set ablaze a popular television outfit in Benin, southwest Nigeria. In some other cases, there were incidence of attacks on political opponents and setting vehicles and offices ablaze. This was indeed a dangerous situation as scholar have argued that a critical study of the Rwandan saga especially as it relates to the genocide in Rwanda against the Tutsis, began just exactly the same way. For example, as far back as 1999, it was noted that the media played significant role as noted by Abubakar, S (1999):

They, then, use media propaganda effectively, to propagate hatred against this target group. The propaganda helps in brainwashing militant youth organised in militias, that are used, not only to control the actions of the national, or, ethnic group of the genoddaires, but also to exterminate the target group. The control of the national, or, ethnic group whose fanatical militants are being prepared to perpetrate genocide, includes the elimination of rational and liberal members of that group who are

opposed to genocide. They are called traitors from within. Extreme "tension, crisis and fear are also generated by the organizers (the genocide within both the target group and their own group. In most cases, they capitalize on serious national crisis - economic or political - to unleash their violence on innocent people. In doing so, those of them who are placed in strategic state institutions, use these institutions, national and/ or local, depending upon their strength, in the implementation of their genocidal plans. Above all, they fashion extreme racist ideology, which they use to fuel a fanatical determination in their militants to engage in extremely, barbaric and brutally inhuman annihilation of the target group. As elucidated with precision by Africa Rights, on pages 46- 47 of their well-documented book, Rwanda: Death, Despair and Defiance, "Killing huge numbers of people in a short space of time is a complex task requiring sophisticated mobilization." But it can take place even in a society without the modern infrastructure and the sophistication of Nazi Germany.

These types of propaganda often employed by the politicians have over the years worked in helping them to destabilize the country as a way of achieving their aims. Thus up to the eve of the elections, the headlines of the major newspapers and other print/visual media has been as outlined below; *Rumbles in the Land , Freedom War Declared TSM Magazine, Now, Nigeria is Finished – (TELL), Make Up or Break Up – The African Guardian, Nigeria Breaks – (The NEWS), Ohanaeze Can No Longer Guarantee Peace In The East – (<http://www.punchng.com>), Tension in Onitsha as Hausa residents flee city –(Punch), Kano Multiple Blasts: There's A Grand Design To Set Nigeria On Fire – Sultan – (Leadership), MASSOB Will Soon Declare War On North –(<http://nationalmirroronline>), Nigerian Crisis Worsens as the Igbo issue Ultimatum to All Muslims to Quit the South-East –(This Day), The Killing of Igbos in Northern Nigeria Has Started!, US Army Prepares for Nigeria's Possible Break-up (2015) –(<http://www.newsrescue.com/2009/08>), WAR DRUMS - Northerners flee Asaba, Southerners flee Northern part of Nigeria... (huhuonline.com), Boko Haram Supports Buhari Candidacy, Nigeria will burn if Buhari wins....Al-Qaeda wants to make Nigeria its next HQ – (elombah.com), Boko Haram plans massive bombings in seven states - (PUNCH).*

In the case of the 2015 Presidential Election, the media (with specific reference to television, radio and newspapers), was at the disposal of the highest bidders. They were ready to publish or air any news as long as the client was ready to pay even when it threatens the corporate existence of the nation. This act totally contradicts the major role of the media in election issues as opined by Iredia (2007). Iredia Tony, the former Director General of Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) states the problem in this regard very clearly thus:

...Through the media...the people must be assisted to premise their choices of rationality and vote wisely during elections. They must have all information that is needed to elect the right candidates who can ensure good governance. Where such

public awareness is lacking, those of us in the media must accept a share of the blame of failed elections in Nigeria.

From the above, it is clear that through the promotion of hate speech circulation, the media tactically neglected her responsibility as contained in Sections 22 and 39 of the 1999 Constitution which bestow on her the power to rightly inform the people as well as to hold government and individuals accountable for their actions. This is even more dangerous considering the fact that the level of enlightenment in the Nigerian society is such that a lot of people still believe that any information in printed form or aired from the radio/television is the gospel truth.

After the 2015 National Elections: Any Lesson

Now that the 2015 Election is won and lost, it is clear that Nigerians still have a lot to learn. This is even more important when we consider the fact that the processes involved in campaigning and electioneering in Nigeria is dangerous and capable of leading to the disintegration of the Nigerian state. It is this light that scholars have argued that the political class in Nigeria seems not to be learning from the lessons of history as it is fast becoming clear that at the end of every election in the country, there are always casualties who are mostly the masses. This has been amply captured by Usman Y (2002):

If you don't learn from history, you are doomed to repeat it...For it seems that as we head towards...general elections...politicians and other political actors in the country have adamantly refused to learn from our history, and are again taking our country towards the sort of crises of political succession that in earlier decades had wrecked our attempt to build a durable civilian democracy

This view is better appreciated when seen in the light of the fact that politics is supposed to unite and not divide a people, as seems to be the case in Nigeria. It is in line with this that Geoffrey and Peter's definition of politics (cited in Babawale, 2007), becomes even more relevant. Politics, according to the scholars, involves everything, like activity of the individuals and their groups, for the reconciliation of conflicting interests without undermining or destroying a sense of security and participation among members of the community. In developed parts of the world, the people will always tell you that at the end of the elections, the country will still remain and as such the people must work together to maintain peace and orderliness, before, during and after the elections. This was the case demonstrated by Hillary Clinton, when in her

acceptance speech after she had been declared winner as the Senator representing the State of New York on November 7, 2000, she noted, “Today, we voted along party lines as Democrats and Republicans; tomorrow, we are going to live together as New Yorkers”. Commenting on the import of this, Ayo-Aderele S (2015), opined thus;

This was a remarkable statement, considering that the entire elections had been a keenly contested one, especially between the Democratic candidate/incumbent Vice-President, Al Gore; and the Republican candidate/son of a former president, George W. Bush. Then outgoing President Bill Clinton had beaten the older Bush hands down in the 1992 presidential elections, effectively making then President George H. W. Bush one of the few American presidents who failed to secure a second term. Clinton held on to the presidency for two terms of eight years – an unnerving experience for the Republicans. This notwithstanding, though the Republicans saw the 2000 elections as a make-or-break race, fighting dirty with acerbic words, half truths and outright lies were never a part of the game. It’s perhaps one of the reasons why the American ways of doing things remain one of the few positive examples nations sometimes draw from.

The above possibly gave credence to the position maintained by Adediran (cited in Armstrong, M , 1999), when he opined thus:

...Even in politically stable nations like the United States of America (USA), intergroup frictions exist. But even the most resistant groups in the USA, have become Americanized, conforming to national identity, the characters of which are clearly understood by the constituent units. The US has rightly been referred to as the melting pot of diverse groups of immigrant communities from numerous different and assorted cultures. The synthesis in the US is a testimony to the fact that it would take the diffusion of diverse political, ideological and scientific movements to change thing; hence plurality in the Nigerian nation should be seen as an asset rather than a burden

Research has established the fact that while Nigeria still treat hate speeches and their perpetrators with kid gloves, most countries of the world consider it and their perpetrators as enemies of the state. For example, hate speech is prohibited by law in several jurisdictions such as Canada, France, the United Kingdom and South Africa. In the United Kingdom, under Section 5 of its Public Order Act (POA), Harry Taylor, an atheist who placed drawings satirizing Christianity and Islam in an airport prayer room, was convicted in April 2010 and given a six-month prison sentence. In South Africa, Julius Malema, the former ANC’s Youth League leader was in 2011 convicted of hate speech for promoting the song, “Kill the Boer”. In France, right-wing politician Jean Marie Le Pen, runner-up in the 2002 presidential election, was in 2005 convicted of inciting racial hatred for comments made to Le Monde in 2003 about the consequences of Muslim immigration in France. Unfortunately, just weeks to the 2015 General

election in Nigeria, Prof. Chidi Odinkalu, the Chairman, Governing Council of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), informed a gathering that the NHRC was still planning to establish Election Violence Incidence Centre (EVIC), in addition to other precautionary measures aimed at checking the incidence of hate speech and other negative tendencies capable of disrupting the polls (Tartius R, 2015). International Law and national legal frameworks both prohibit such speech.

At the International level, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) states that any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law (ICCPR, Article 20 (2)). The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), Article 4 also provides for states to declare an offence punishable by law “all dissemination of ideas based on racial superiority or hatred, incitement to racial discrimination acts of violence or incitement to such acts against any race or group of persons of another color or ethnic origin”. However, in Nigeria, it is clear that, we are not taking seriously the effect of this hate speech and attendant impact.

It is in line with the above that there is the need for the country to begin a legitimate, transparent and open process and mechanism of legislation that will eventually culminate in the making of an effective law against the use of hate speeches, whether in rallies, campaign, religious gatherings or on social media.

There is also the need to develop, in conjunction with critical organs of the society such as media owners and practitioners, taxonomy of what constitutes hate speech. This has been the position of scholars and experts who have keenly watched the Nigeria political landscape since the return of democratic rule. To be able to make this more effective, media houses through their unions must ensure that they incorporate these as part of good journalism practice and impose sanctions on erring members who publish or broadcast hate speech-laden materials. According to the Nigerian Press Council, the Nigerian media have fallen victim of manipulations by government and politicians. The Council went on to express this fall in standard thus:

...We are being witnesses to the fallen standard of journalistic profession and its negative contributions to nation building through a hackneyed uncouth and indiscrete reporting of events and issues... ethnic polarization of media houses and consequent undue influence on power and political tussles. As a result, in moment of crisis, the media become ready tools for those actively involved in the crisis of power.

There is also the need to begin to re-emphasize that part of our culture that promotes the respect of the individual. In most of our villages, it is clear that the unwritten constitution of the land frowns at hate speeches especially when it denigrates the person/people or family involved. In most cases, the minimum punishment for such act is ex-communication.

The National Orientation Agency, with the help of civil society groups and community leaders, should also embark on a campaign against the use of hate speech. In doing this, pamphlets, handbills, posters in all Nigerian languages should be employed. Jingles as well as documentaries showing the effects of such on the society should reach every corner of the country.

Conclusion

From the discourse so far, it is clear that hate speech took the centre stage as it almost became a legal instrument of campaign. This became even more worrisome when the major political parties during this period tried to outdo each other in terms of hate speeches. This had so much negative impact on both the people, their disposition towards the elections as well as the candidates. Thus up to the eve of the 2015 General elections, the general impression was that it had been turned into a theatre of hate speeches and campaigns coloured in a form that defies logic and common sense. In fact some days to the election, the National Human Rights Commission reported evidence of established footprint of pre-election violence which had spread beyond the 22 states, while election-related violence in some form were already wide spread in nearly all the states of Nigeria. While the paper argue that this is not good for the political development of the country, it also advises that the government in conjunction with the Independent National Electoral Commission and other relevant agencies including those in the academic circle must work together to prevent such occurrence in future. It is also important that those that have taken to politics as their major business and occupation should help save the country from collapse by desisting from speeches and acts that are capable of setting the nation ablaze.

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