

Elections, Insecurity and Secessionist Agitations in South-Eastern Nigeria

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Abstract

The essence of this paper is to interrogate effects of insecurity and secessionist agitations on electoral process in the South-Eastern Nigeria. In carrying out this research four objectives were stated and four research questions rose to guide the study. Primary sources such as archival materials and secondary sources namely books, journal articles and internet sources were utilized for data collection. Data analysis is based on case study methods. The findings indicated that the South-Eastern Nigeria remains a hotspot for secessionist agitations and insecurity. Secessionist agitations and insecurity undermines elections, leads to voting apathy, electoral manipulation and emergence of incompetence political leaders. For better electoral outings security and intelligence gathering should be the top priorities of the electoral institution conducting elections in the region. Above all, tolerance, respect for human rights and opinion is significant in quelling secessionist agitations.

Keywords: Agitation, Election, Insecurity, Secession, South-East, Nigeria

Introduction

Elections are big issue in every country that aspires to deepen democratic governance. It is hard to jettison conduct of elections for it is through electoral process that credible leaders are elected to deliver good governance, peace, security and development. Nneka (2014) argued that a democratic government should ensure that there are a free and fair elections. Nigeria has never conducted free and fair elections. The country has never experienced any credible elections. Since 1960s, the country has witnessed electoral fraud and violence that has threatened its national security and social wellbeing.

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Insecurity has become a major bane to the effective conduct of elections most especially in Nigeria (Kazeem, 2021). Highly bothersome is the state of insecurity and secessionist agitations that undermine elections in South Eastern region of the country. The zone, hitherto characterized by peace, progress and tranquility is turned to theatre of insecurity as a result of the resurgence of secessionist agitations that have jeopardized the socio-economic situation and rural-urban livelihood in the region (Robert, 2021).

The essence of this paper is to interrogate how secessionist agitations serves as a source of insecurity and discomfort to effective conduct of elections in the South-Eastern Nigeria. It examines causes and impact of secessionist agitations on the electoral process. Every time elections are about to be conducted in the zone the secessionist agitators always take one position or another that of letting the State know that no election would be conducted unless the region is granted the Independent State of Biafra which they failed to actualize in the 1960s following the brutal civil war of 1967-1970. This situation has created serious state of insecurity in the zone as different groups takes advantage of the secessionist campaign to cause violence and killings of innocent people.

Since insecurity is a very wide phenomenon and deeply exists in the country, many scholars have discussed the trend from economic, social and political perspectives but have not look at how it is being influenced by the rising secessions agitations in South-Eastern Nigeria. As part of the drive towards finding diverse solutions to the lingering problem this paper intends to look at insecurity and its nexus with secession agitations with untold effect on electoral exercise.

I argued that bad leadership, corruption, neglect of the people's rights, unemployment, neglect of post-civil war true reconciliation and deficient infrastructural developments are the main causes of secessionist agitations in Southeastern Nigeria. When citizens don't have basic development needs to be provided by their government they tend to form followership to any other ideological linens that is highly promising in the fulfillment of their dreams and life aspirations.

The first section of the study looks at the conceptual clarifications of major themes, literature reviews, research objectives, questions, methods and scope of the study; the second section examines the state of insecurity and secessionist agitations in

South-Eastern Nigeria; the third section interrogates the impact of insecurity and secessionist agitations on electoral process; while the fourth section analyses secessionist agitation and no-election campaign in Anambra State.

Conceptual Framework

❖ Secessionist Agitations

There is no unanimous definition of secessionist agitations. However, scholars have conceptualized the phenomenon from different perspectives. Amanambu (2017) defines agitation as a situation in which people protest or argue especially in public with the aim of achieving a particular goal. According to Klemes in cited in Ikeh (2021) agitation transcends into a situation in which people protest or argue especially in public to achieve a particular type of change therefore sectional agitation refers to a situation in which a group of people related ethnically or politically protest or argue to achieve a change.

E. Osaghae et al. (2017) noted that agitations linked to social movements often manifest from grievances and social discontent against dominant practices, behaviours and conducts in the political economy such as exclusion, marginality and inequality.

Furthermore, Charles and Falola (2020) argued that secession is a group or territory's political removal from a sovereign and recognized state and establishment as a distinct sovereign body. While secession may be achieved through a variety of means, it is rare for peaceful secessions to occur. Secession is a political activity of a violent or non-violent nature which is aimed at independence or some form of self-rule short of independence from autonomy to a loose of bi-national or multi-state federal system (Omului, 1996).

From the foregoing, secessionist tendency is an attempt by a particular section of a country to create their own sovereign nation out of the existing sovereign State which they leave sometimes as a result of social exclusion and marginalization. However, secessionist action cannot develop if there is equity and fairness in governance, different opinions and political interests of every parts of a country are maximally accommodated and protected.

❖ Election

Election is a prerequisite of democracy. Fala (2005) defines elections as giving legitimacy to the regime by producing pro-regime elites that are less inclined to challenge the status quo. It shows that elections do not mean democratization, but fair and free election that can lead to democracy. Election is also conceptualized as the process of choosing leaders who oversee the whole affairs of a country over a particular period of time an exercise that allows the people to exercise their franchise freely through the ballot box. There are two basic types of elections; primary and general elections. Primary elections are held prior to a general election to determine party candidates for the general election. The winning candidates in the primary go on to represent that party in the general election (George, 2007).

Election is the height of widening the democratic space where citizens are given the utmost opportunity to choose their leaders who will lead and empower them for social advancement. Through elections new breed of leaders are elected to contribute in advancing the cause of development and provisions of social services in the society.

❖ Insecurity

Daniel, (2021) defined insecurity as the state of fear or anxiety stemming from lack of protection. It is inadequate freedom from danger. Achumba, Ighomeroho, Akpor (2013) defines insecurity from two perspectives. Firstly, insecurity is the state of being open or subject to danger or threat of danger, where risk is the condition of being susceptible to harm or injury. Secondly, insecurity is the state of being exposed to anxiety, where unease is a vague unpleasant emotion that is experienced in anticipation of some misfortune.

Review of the Literature

Insecurity, secession and elections are topical issues in contemporary Nigeria. Scholars have approached the three discourses from diverse angles thereby proffering solutions on how it can be ameliorated. Adeleke (2013) examines insecurity as a threat to human existence and economic development in Nigeria. He discusses the causes and government efforts at stamping out insecurity in the country. The study revealed that the power shift from the North to the South is currently on top of the list of issues that are instigating groups and individuals against the interests of the state.

Similarly, Ogu et al. ((2022) examines the effect of politicizing insecurity by political actors and its implication on the proper and efficient management of the Nigerian correctional service. Data for the study was collected through documentary sources and analyzed appropriately using the qualitative-descriptive method. The study established that there appears to be a convoluted relationship between certain segments of the government or its security personnel and the terrorists wreaking havoc on the Nigerian state and this has had adverse effects on the efficient management of the nation's correctional service.

Agri ((2020) investigates the root causes, socioeconomic impacts of insecurity in Nigeria. This study uses the survey method of research to gather information from key informants. Structured questionnaires, interview and focus group discussion were adopted. The questionnaires were sorted, classified and interpreted using the linkert scale, simple percentages, statistical tables and charts. Nigeria has witnessed unprecedented spate of insecurity occasioned by terrorism and kidnapping with serious socioeconomic consequences.

Otu and Eke (2022) examines the voting trajectory of Nigerians in the last two presidential elections with the purpose of enlightening voters on the importance of their choice and its possible implication on the development paradigm of the country. This was done with data from extant literature and questionnaire administered to a cluster of respondents hence a correlation research design. The chi-square was used for the analysis of data generated through the questionnaire and insights were also drawn from scholarly opinions and empirical historical substantiations whose outcomes form the essence of the analysis of the paper.

Akokpari (2012) explores the factors causing high incidence of election-related violence and insecurity. He argues that the traditional argument about the desire to access the state as a means of accumulation cannot be discounted as a fact raising the stakes during elections. Electoral victory is a matter of life and death in a region characterized by poverty and adversity.

Perpetua et al. (2021) explores the views of participants on the persistent ethnic agitations and threat of secession in Nigeria and the implications it holds for social work practices in Nigeria. The study adopted the qualitative approach of data collection from twelve purposively selected participants using in-depth interviews. Data were thematically analyzed. Findings shows that marginalization, ethnic

hatred and misinformation were notable factors fuelling ethnic agitations, especially in the Southeast and Southwest region. The study recommends active engagement of social workers in the forefront of intense community education as well as advocacy for fairness, equitable distribution of resources, and opportunities for all citizens.

Scholars have examined insecurity in Nigeria from different points of views to the neglect of how secessionist agitations fuel it especially in the Southeast. Of a truth insecurity is widespread across the country but each zone has its own peculiarities of the problem. With regard to the South-East secessionist agitation serves as a breeding ground for insecurity. However, the perspective on how it effects elections in that zone has not being examined, hence, the need for this study.

Methods and Sources

The research method for this study was qualitative and descriptive method. Qualitative research designs involve the systematic and accurate collection, description and comparison, analyses and presentation of data to answer questions on a given situation or phenomenon (Ajayi and Abanobi, 2017). It is qualitative because it deals with the state of affairs as it exists at present such as the issue of insecurity, secessionist agitations and elections in South-Eastern Nigeria. Data for the study was collected through primary sources such as archival materials obtained from Central Intelligence Agency and Council of Europe Archives and secondary sources for data collection namely, newspapers, books, journal articles and internet sources.

❖ Scope of the Study

The scope of this study covers the South-Eastern Nigeria. It focuses on the States across the geopolitical zone, namely, Anambra, Abia, Imo, Ebonyi and Enugu States. The study mainly focuses on the effects of insecurity and secessionist agitations in Southeastern states because of the heavy presence of different secessionist groups and non-state actors that leveraged on their pro-secessionist activities to destabilize the zone and makes conduct of elections a very difficult task.

Insecurity and Secessionist Agitations in South-Eastern Nigeria: An Analysis

Insecurity is a product of human distresses arising from ripple effects of bad leadership, inconsistent policy formulations, and ethnic disharmony, and tribalism, economic and social dislocations in the society. The Nigerian State is not isolated from the effects of the above social problems bedeviling the human society.

Since her independence on 1st October 1960 the country had witnessed different forms of insecurity ranging from political and leadership insecurity caused by heightened disagreement among the regions, ethnic nationalities, and political parties over who would mount the leadership position of the country. Since then, the nation has been immersed in one crisis or another that crystalized to military coup d'état and subsequent internal crisis that changed the social and political landscape of the country and emergence of secessionist agitations.

The Nigerian State witnessed her foremost secessionist agitations in the 1950s and 1960s. The latter culminated to a civil war following the declaration of the Republic of Biafra by Lieutenant-Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu on May 30 1967 (Nwankwo, 1972). Ojukwu's action was viewed as an outrage by the military regime under Major-General Yakubu Gowon. Therefore, Gowon mobilized the Nigerian Armed Forces with support from powerful external forces to downgrade Biafra. Biafra under Ojukwu responded to the Federal military onslaught using every means possible including foreign support. The two sides had engaged one another in a fierce battle that claimed millions of lives until Biafra capitulated and surrendered on 15 January 1970 (Harold, 1971).

However, the end of the civil war did not resolve fundamental problems that lay dormant in the Nigerian State, but were now surfaced again (Central Intelligence Agency, 1970). As a result, groups agitating for a revival of the Republic of Biafra reappeared shortly after the return to democracy in 1999, alongside with other secessionist movements across Nigeria. According to Enyinnaya Abaribe "there are over thirty separatist groups in Southeastern region," (Cletus, 2021) keeping alive, both at the local and global level the agitation for the restoration of Republic of Biafra.

Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) was the strongest of this early generation of secessionist groups. Its leader, Ralph

Uwazuruike, was on several occasions arrested and released. As a result, the coming into existence of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), with mass appeal and huge membership, revolutionized the agitation for a sovereign state of Biafra. The group was formed and led by Nnamdi Kanu (Vincent, 2017). While pro-secessionist organizations appear to be using non-violent approach in the pursuit of Biafra's restoration, secessionist campaigns have in recent times served as breeding grounds for insecurity in the South East.

The establishment of a paramilitary group by IPOB known as the Eastern Security Network in contradistinction to secessionist agenda opened the floodgate of insecurity in the zone (Raphael, 2021). Whether the motive for establishing the security network is moral or not the fundamental reality is that such a security outfit has contributed to escalation of insecurity in the region.

The emergence of ESN did not receive any generous support from the State and Federal governments. Instead, the Nigerian Armed Forces and sister security agencies have engaged in armed confrontations with the secessionist paramilitary group operating in the South East. For example, on 18 February 2021 the Nigerian military launched an attack in the ESN camps at Umunna forests in Orlu and Orsu Local Government Areas of Imo State. The military initiated the attack based on intelligence report that members of the ESN have set up a base in the forest from where they planned to execute their operations. According to an eyewitness account cited in Anayo et al (2021):

...we saw over 30 trucks of the military moving in their convoy in and out of Orlu in search of the members of the ESN. They kept searching for them throughout Wednesday and yesterday, they discovered their camps and started destroying them. On the first day, they even used helicopters to hover around the forest locating their camps. The truth is that villages close to the forest are living in fear as the sound of guns and airstrikes made them ran inside their houses and some of them abandoned their homes out of fear of being hit by stray bullets.

As argued by Mbachu, "soldiers are out in force in the southeast, staffing checkpoints on the potholed roads, scrutinizing drivers and passengers as they filter slowly past sandbagged positions. Their air force has also been in action, strafing alleged ESN hideouts in a densely populated region." Free movement of innocent

people on the major roads, streets, villages and towns was restricted due to the ongoing internal security operations in the area.

The #EndSars coupled with the ongoing secessionist agitations helped to breed hardened unknown armed groups in the South East who engaged in the attacks of security formations and government buildings including the INEC offices. Since December 2020, no fewer than seven if not more police stations have been set ablaze while security personnel have lost their lives in the hands of the unknown gunmen in the South-East from Anambra to Imo, Enugu to Ebonyi and Abia (Oko et al, 2021). The security situation in the zone has deteriorated such that the police and other security agencies mandated to protect the people could not do so especially as they are target of attacks themselves (Joe, 2021).

Despite these heinous attacks, majority of people in the region appeared to have unwavering support for the secessionist cause. One piece of evidence is the unabated call for sit-at-home being obeyed in the region. This is normally done on the 31st of May of every year in remembrance of the Nigerian Civil War victims. However, the motive behind the sit-at-home order changed following the arrest of the IPOB leader, Nnamdi Kanu, in Kenya and extradition to Nigeria. Kanu was charged with a treasonable felony offence by the Federal Government of Nigeria. Ever since then, the South East has been observing sit-at-homes on a weekly basis (Okoye, 2021). According to Okoye (2021):

The prevailing situation of the shutdown of the South-East every Monday has continued to inflict damage on the economy of the South-Eastern states. The hoi polloi, who eke out their daily livelihoods by hawking sachet beverages, vegetables, fruits and others bears the brunt of the weekly shutdown of the South East. Since the commencement of the observation of the sit-at-home order on Mondays a majority of Igbo people whose survival depends on their daily earnings, had gone to bed on empty stomachs on countless nights because they had no money with which to buy food. Again, enforcers of the sit-at-home order have inadvertently been dealing a fatal blow to education in the area...

Due to the seriousness of the situation, people are compelled to remain indoors to register their concern over the fate of IPOB leader in detention. The absence of security operatives on most occasions during the lockdown has worsened the issues of sit-at-a-home and insecurity in the geopolitical zone (Vincent, 2021).

Cultists and armed robbers have seized the opportunity of secessionist agitations to operate freely in the zone. Cult-related conflicts have raged in many towns and villages in the South East. It has moved from the institutions of higher learning to the street and communities. The disappearance of police patrol teams on the roads enabled the intensity of cult groups terrorizing various communities in the zone such that hardly a day passed without the death of suspected cultists killed by rival members (David, 2021).

Insecurity occasioned by secessionist agitations has produced unknown gunmen who moved around freely in political gatherings across different the South Eastern states. For instance, in Anambra State, in two different locations, gunmen killed two persons and wounded many at a campaign venue by one of the political parties contesting for the Governorship position of the state. The attacks took place in Uruagu Nnewi and Nnobi (Nasir, 2021). Consistent attacks on political campaign venues have placed the security of the zone under threat.

Contentious issues that triggered the insecurity and secessionist agitations in the South East are numerous. The impact of the civil war on the region's political and economic landscape cannot be overemphasized. Marginalization of the zone in contemporary Nigeria brings to the fore the idea of Biafra. Many tend to lose faith in the possibility of a united Nigeria and expressed a sense of nationality in the creation of Biafra (Olajide, 2009).

Underrepresentation in matters of national security fuels separatist agitations. Every decision made on security matters in the zone at the higher echelon of security architecture is carried out without a person of Igbo stock. This situation creates more anger and strong solidarity for the pro-secessionist groups that have already exploited the narrative to strengthen the message of self-determination. Ayo Adebajo, the leader of Afenifere in Yoruba land said:

Imagine a room full of security chiefs where the overwhelming majority takes decisions...whatever dissenting voice will be feeble, unsure. So the minority, knowing that they will always be outnumbered will simply acquiesce and hold their peace and the decision will certainly fail to reflect the pluralism of Nigeria... What this does to the psyche of Nigerians especially in the South-East is an absolute loss of confidence in the security architecture of the nation... (Lekan, 202).

Lack of infrastructural development contributes to secessionist agitations in the South-East. The region is disfranchised in many areas of infrastructure and rural-urban development. Roads in the South-East are dilapidated particularly Federal roads such as the Amansea-Ugwoba axis of Enugu-Onitsha expressway; Onitsha-Owerri road and Onitsha-Otuocha road are left unrepaired. The roads are death traps and inaccessible. People sleep on the road for days before they can continue their journey (Jeff, 2021). A seaport in the region such as the Onitsha seaport is not working. The zone lacked strategic national assets that add value to people's lives. Instead they tend to migrate to other parts of the country or abroad as a route for success in life. Because the infrastructures needed to succeed in life is nowhere to be found in the zone.

Ethnic solidarities have aided pro-secessionist movements in the Southeast to amass sympathies and support. For instance, the detention of Nnamdi Kanu for a long time despite the court ruling that called for his immediate release stoked ethnic solidarity, even from the people averse to his brand of messages. The sit-at-home tactic is a manifestation of ethnic solidarities accompanying the secessionist agitations. The more the ethnic group use refusal to grant bail as another instance of injustice, the more they thicken their stances to defend their own (Jideofor, 2017).

Leadership failure is responsible for secessionist agitations in the country. Without a doubt, good leadership is a dire need in Africa (2021, Channels Television). In Nigeria, the result of bad leadership is collapsed infrastructure and retrogression, frustration among the people and agitations for separation from the country (Sulaimon, 2021).

Human rights violations and abuses have been a common feature in the escalation of secessionist agitations in the South East. Even though the secessionist groups have at times acted in a manner that is provocative the use of force to quell their activities is a precipice to human rights abuses. According to Amnesty International cited in Premium Times (2021):

Nigerian security forces have committed a catalogue of human rights violations and crimes under international law in their response to sparkling violence in the Southeastern Nigeria... The evidence gathered shows a damning picture of ruthless excessive force by the Nigerian security forces in Imo, Anambra, and Abia states. The estimated death toll of violence between January and June 2021 in Anambra, Imo, Abia

and Ebonyi run into the hundreds. Dozens of soldiers moved from house to house, arresting youth on suspicion that they had a link with ESN militants...

Reports by international human rights organisations and civil society organisations attested to gross violations of the rights of pro-Biafra secessionists by the state. While the government is eager to curtail the menace of secessionist agitations likewise human rights abuses are committed thereby undermining the integrity of government intentions in the whole process.

Poverty is a painful reality of life in Nigeria. It is acute and raw, a paradox, because of the vast natural resources available to the country (Punch Editorial Board, 2021). Poverty is highly entrenched in the South-East (Oludayo, 2021). To feed have become difficult due to high prices of foodstuffs and the worsening inflation in the zone. According to Bishop Sunday Onuoha:

When you go to various communities and see the level of suffering and pain the people are facing and compare that with the level of affluence in our society and the resources we are wasting in living luxurious lives that are not necessary you will weep...we are building a society where there will be anger from young people who feel marginalized, neglected and left out there with no one caring for them. And so, they are fighting society (Luminous 2021).

Absence of jobs for the teeming unemployed youths is a major element of agitation. When young people are denied opportunity to secure even a first job, their unemployment can become a major ingredient for political instability and secessionist activities. According to Ayuba Philibus Wabba, the current President of the Nigerian Labour Congress, (NLC), “there is no difference between unemployment and insecurity; it is a fact that has been established. Decent jobs are very important because without decent jobs there will be no security, no social progress for everybody” (Adepeju, 2021).

Militarization and Government crackdown on the secessionist groups have tightened the security situation in the South East thereby making people to fear for their lives. To worsen the situation, military presence and crackdown on the secessionist groups have led to the killings and arrest of members of the secessionist groups. According to Osai Ojigho of Amnesty International, “2017 heavy-handed response against pro-Biafra activists further stirred up tensions in the South East of

Nigeria. Brutal approach to crowd control employed by security forces when policing peaceful pro-Biafra protests has left more than 150 dead since August, 2015, not to mention cases of enforced disappearance and unlawful detention” (Amnesty International, 2017).

Although the security agencies have consistently denied these allegations, the fact is that military presence in the East further created loopholes for insecurity. The brutal force used to carry out the exercise has further emboldened the secessionists to intensify their campaign in the zone.

Insecurity: Secessionist Agitations and Electoral Process

Credible and inclusive elections are fundamental to democratic growth (Soonest, 2021). However, the fundamental challenges been encountered in electoral management and processes are institutional failures, inadequate resources, breakdown of Biometric Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), poor preparations, electoral violence and intimidation, especially among the political parties (Chukwudi, 2018).

With porous security situation conduct of elections in the South-Eastern Nigeria has become a nightmare. Elections cannot be conducted smoothly in an atmosphere of chaos and violence rather in an environment of peace and tranquility. According to the Chairman of INEC Yakubu Mahmood:

The commission needs a safe and secured environment for efficient and professional deployment of staff and materials. We must realize that young men and women doing their National Youth Service form the bulk of our presiding Electoral Officers. Some of them are the only sons and daughters of their parents. Some of them graduated from school through determined perseverance in the face of hardship. Some of them are the products of community effort, while some of them did menial jobs to graduate. We, therefore, have a responsibility to protect them in the performance of this national assignment. No form of insurance can cover for the loss of life and the commission will not account compromise on the safety and welfare of these individuals and all other staff that will be deployed for the election (Sodiq, 2021).

One thing is to have standard electoral guidelines, procedures, logistics, and manpower to execute elections and another is to have the right atmosphere to

utilize these instruments. Thus, insecurity wreaking havoc across the nation affects electoral planning and executions.

Insecurity has posed a threat to polling units where votes are cast. Polling units are central to the electoral process. According to Jibrin Ibrahim, “Polling units constitute the basic structure of Nigeria’s electoral system and democracy...” (Jibrin, 2021). Polling units across the country have been expanded for easy accessibility and convenience for voting. However, insecurity has denied many eligible voters of casting their votes at the polling units for the candidates of their choice.

Another effect of insecurity on electoral process is voter apathy. Nigeria’s aversion for voting during elections is well known. Bishop Mathew Kukah argued that “voter apathy is rampant across the world but voter apathy in Africa and Nigeria has consequences...” (Kunle, 2021). For instance, report from the 6 November 2021 gubernatorial election in Anambra State revealed high level of voter apathy in virtually all the twenty-one local government areas in the state attributed to the secessionist agitations and insecurity in the South East (Ayodele, 2021).

INEC’s Supervising Resident Electoral Commissioner to Anambra, Sam Egwu, argued that the fear of the pro-secessionist group IPOB was able to instill in many potential residents contributed to the low turnout of voters. For him:

There is a whole state of fear that has been created by the politics of agitation for a separate state in this part of the country. IPOB has been able to enforce the sit-at-home order over time. So, the fear of IPOB has become the beginning of wisdom. As the SREC for Onitsha North, Onitsha South and Ogbaru LGAs, IPOB had a significant impact on the voter turnout. The turnout was less than 25 percent of all accredited voters across the 21 LGAs. We have a problem with extremely low voter turnout. The turnout, I think, if you are scientific in terms of what we are seeing in many local governments, you are actually dealing with less than 25 percent voter turnout and this is not really good for our democracy (Noah, 2021).

Militarization of polling causes voter’s apathy. Occasionally, polling units delineated for purpose of voting in Nigeria has huge security presence. According to CLEEN report, “there is presence of different security agents including the Nigerian Army Forces during elections...” (Ebuka, 2019). While the tasks of the security forces are to maintain law and order at the polls many of them indulge in intimidation,

killing and carting away electoral materials and denying of access to the electoral centers.

Insecurity can force the electoral umpire to delimit areas where elections supposed to hold thereby sidelining the people of the areas due to insecurity from exercising their franchise. For instance, Ahead of the Governorship election in Anambra State, INEC took a decision that there will be no voting in eighty-six out of five thousand seven hundred and twenty Polling Units in the state. Out of 894 that is 15.6 percent of the PUs only boast of one to 49 voters. The commission cannot deploy personnel and materials to the Pus without voters. This can be partly attributed to the security situation in the state which affected the commission's pre-election outdoor activities including voter education and sensitization (Sodiq, 2021).

Vote-buying at polling units has continued to play a huge role in Nigeria's electoral process. Vote-buying is an electoral offence that undermines the legitimacy of elections and weakens representative democracy. Lack of enforcement or punishments for this electoral offence had allowed the practice to persist and grow (Vanguard, 2021). According to Joe Okei-Odumakin, President of Women Arise for Change Initiative:

The incidence of vote buying and inducement became so prominent than it has never been...This portends danger not only to our electoral process, but also to democracy as a whole. It will simply mean that the choice of leadership will no longer be on the basis of programmes or party manifestos but rather, the highest bidder on election days, no matter how incompetent (Chukwudi, 2018).

Buying and selling of votes is a major factor showing how the people have lost confidence on the government that sworn to protect their lives and properties. Having experienced untold hardship with nobody to assist those people tends to succumb to vote inducement by politicians who make promises to make things better for them.

Mayhem on INEC offices across the South-East endangers electoral materials and logistics. Many INEC offices in different states and local governments in the region have been hit by the unknown gunmen. For instance, in May 2021, INEC pavilion which serves as its collation center at Awka in Anambra state was burnt alongside two of its facilities in Imo and Enugu by unknown gunmen. According to Festus

Okoye, “two stores housing electoral materials, 376 generating sets and seven utility vehicles (Toyota Hilux) were completely burnt in the coordinated attack on its state headquarters in Awka...” (Samson, 2021).

Due to insecurity in the South-East voters are reluctant to come out and register and collect their Permanent Voters Cards to enable them cast their votes on Election Day. The challenges and unresolved hitches that trailed distribution of PVCs by INEC have become worst due to insecurity in the region. Insecurity in the South-East has denied hundreds of thousands of registered voters the opportunity of being captured in the e-service owing to far distance and other artificial bottlenecks. Rural dwellers have to travel about five kilometers or more to locate their wards and collation centers usually located at Local Government Headquarters or community centers. This is totally cumbersome and poses security risk (Vanguard, 2014).

Acute distrust exists among the Southeasterners over votes’ unaccountability despite going to the polling unit to exercise their civil responsibility. This perception is deeply rooted in the history of elections in the region where political elites had their way in the electoral process through manipulative tendencies and godfatherism. According to Human Rights Watch report on “Violence, Godfathers and Corruption in Nigeria”:

...Powerful and violent political godfathers have gained control over politicians who are dependent on those sponsors to provide protection and fight their street battles. In return, the godfathers have captured government institutions to serve their own interests... (Human Rights Watch, 2007).

No state in the South-East is immune from personality-induced political crisis. Thus, insecurity has made the whole situation very complex. It is difficult to identify the armed non-state actors parading all over the region killing and maiming innocent citizens.

Secessionist Agitation and No-Election Campaign: The Case of Anambra State

Anambra State has been a victim of circumstance in electoral situations. Conduct of elections in the state have always coincided with emerging controversies centered on secessionist agitations in the South East. According to Sulaiman Adejoh, “Anambra State is a very sensitive state in Nigeria due to its key position as a major

center of commerce and distribution of goods to every part of the country. If products come into the country from Lagos or Port Harcourt seaports, the first place it comes is Anambra State before being redistributed” (Onyebuchi, 2021).

In 2017, amid the gubernatorial elections in the state IPOB mounted no-election campaign and demanded for referendum for the restoration of the Republic of Biafra. The election was, however, conducted on 18 November 2017. The governor was successfully sworn into office. Similarly, in preparation for the 2021 governorship election in the state IPOB initiated another no-election campaign in addition with the sit-at-home order. Just like in 2017 no-election campaign threw the November 6 2021 Governorship election into utter confusion. Many stakeholders were concerned about the sit-at-home order and its threat to electioneering process. The Chairman of the Commission, Yakubu Mahmood, said that the spate of attacks in the state might affect the Commission’s plan for the poll if not properly curbed by the concerned authorities:

We are deeply concerned that specific electoral facilities and materials could once more become targets of attack. Recall that in May this year, our state office at Awka was attacked and all the non-sensitive materials assembled for the election at the time were destroyed. In addition, our store, collation centre and the main office building were either totally or substantially damaged. The commission also lost several vehicles to be used for the election...” (Samson, 2021).

The negative consequences of no-election campaign on the political future of Anambra State prompted the South Eastern Council of Traditional Rulers and Representatives of Igbo Bishops and Archbishops on Peace and Conflict Resolution to issue a communiqué on 1st November 2021. The group called on the Federal Government of Nigeria and other stakeholders to explore dialogue and negotiation in resolving critical issues threatening national unity, cohesion and development (Joint Statement by the South East Council of Traditional Rulers, 2021).

While the pro-Biafra no-election campaign declaration gathered momentum, the Federal Government of Nigeria threatened to declare a state of emergency in Anambra to ensure that the November 6 governorship election in the state holds. The Attorney-General of the Federation and Minister of Justice, Abubakar Malami, declared that, “the government is determined to ensure a hitch-free election in Anambra, despite the wave of attacks and killings in the state” (Deborah, 2021).

In between the anxiety on the state of elections in Anambra state, IPOB leadership declared that they do not want to be dragged into the election and that all they were after is the immediate release of their leader: Nnamid Kanu. According to the statement released by the organization on the sit-at-home stances, “...we have nothing to do with the election INEC is conducting and we wonder why INEC would want to drag us into the election...” (Godwin, 2021). This statement was delivered after much pressure mounted on them to change no-election stance by stakeholders both at home and abroad.

While the no-election campaign and its associated controversies lasted, Anambra state election was conducted by INEC with an encouraging voters’ turnout and a very low political violence contrary to predictions and anxieties across the state. Voters were anxious to cast their votes in all designated polling units having defiled the state of insecurity and pro-secessionist stance on the election. Reuben Abati described the election as a major turning point for Nigeria. According to him: “*There were permutations about voter turn-out, preparedness of the electoral umpire, the INEC, the character of the main gladiators in the contest and their supportive stakeholders, divided as they were and still are, along religious, ethnic, clannish and party lines...the big consolation was that the worst that was expected did not happen. Anambra did not become a killing field*” (Abati, 2021).

Anambra election shows that effective leadership is possible if pursued with sincerity and political willingness. With the way all the stakeholders organized themselves and find a common ground for the smooth conduct of the election all hope is not lost in the journey towards ending secessionist agitations and insecurity in the South East.

Conclusion

Insecurity is a global phenomenon. However, it is deeply rooted in the Nigerian State. While the security quagmire is multidimensional, the rise of secessionist agitations in most part of the south has fused into the existing denominations of insecurity. The social fabric and political climate have been severely strained by persistent secessionist agitations with the security architecture overwhelmed to deal with it. All these have produced anxiety in governability, conduct of elections and Nigeria’s vulnerability to disintegration. Over the years, the call for secession has tilted towards the quest for a separate state distinct from the Nigerian State and has

been perceived as nonviolent. However, the move for secession has degenerated to a source of insecurity due to multiplicity of factors that crystallized into endangering peace and stability of Nigeria and its immediate neighbours. Secession is hinged on porosity of Nigeria's political situation and existence of deep structural and foundational problems. Cause of instability and creator of staggered directions for social development and viable economy. The impact of secessionist agitations is its capacity to undermine elections and create state of confusion around the electoral process. It breeds fear, voter apathy, vote-buying, rigging, and lack of trust in the electoral process. However, secessionist agitations should not be seen completely as an obstacle to conduct of elections rather it ought to be an opportunity to deepen democracy and serve as a source of encouragement for the electoral umpire to work hard towards effective and sincere delivery of the electoral process, confidence-building and fair exercise. For having free and fair elections where votes count is a step towards solving some of the issues that causes secession and insecurity. When voters who are also part of the agitators chose their prefer leaders in a free and fair elections surely it tantamount to peace and tranquility. Credible elections are central to secessionist-free country. For better electoral outings security should be the top priority of the electoral institutions conducting elections in the region. Above all, tolerance, respecting people's rights and opinion is highly significant in quelling secessionist agitations.

Recommendations

1. Effective power sharing at the center is the major antidote to secessionist agitations. Because when power is distributed fairly and equitably it will strengthen peaceful harmony and coexistence.
2. The government needs to take due considerations of those specific issues that provokes secessionist tendencies and tackle them swiftly. Some of these issues are concentration of power at the center, uneven political appointment, unemployment, infrastructural decay, lack of political will for power devolution, youth unemployment, absence of restructuring.
3. Youth unemployment needs to be tackled. Since the country has a huge number of unemployed youths the governments need to consistently create jobs for its teeming youth with the view to reduce the urge to agitation.
4. There is the need to address the high level of injustice and inhumane treatment that exists in the South-East and other parts of the country.

5. The Southeasterners should see themselves as one and build bridges with other zones in the country for this is only way they can find a place in the political lexicon of Nigeria.

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