

Voting Amid Violence: The Internally Displaced Persons’ Challenge and Electoral Integrity in Nigeria

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Abstract

Although a few studies have tried to grasp the IDPs problem along with reasons for its protraction, little is known of how displacement impinges on electoral integrity, especially in Africa. While scholars differ in their discernment of the impact of displacement on elections, most arguments usually view internal violence – triggered by different drivers - as a factor in democratization, but fail to highlight the threat that forced migrations pose to democracy’s majoritarian polemic. This paper argues that surges in internal violence over the past decade, especially during the last two electoral cycles (2015 and 2019), has put a dent on Nigeria’s quest for credible and participatory elections. It draws on data from the Boko Haram and herders-farmers conflicts to show that soaring internal violence in Nigeria forcefully displaced many would-be electorates from their voting wards/units, invariably preventing them from exercising their franchise, and thereby stifling participation. It is suggested that to obviate involuntary migration and guarantee the franchise of eligible voters, government and concerned security agencies should collaborate to stem impunity and bolster security so as to intercept drivers of paroxysms in Nigeria.

Keywords: IDPs, Boko-Haram, Farmers-Herdsmen, Electoral Process, Conflict

Introduction

Recent scholarly studies show that spiraling violent conflict has been driving involuntary migration and internal displacement in Nigeria (Mohammed, 2017; Bamidele, 2012). Most researches usually identify inter-ethnic and inter-religious clashes as well as natural disasters, land disputes and indigene-settler conflicts as the main causes of displacements in Nigeria (Adesoji, 2010; Adewale, 2016; Ibeanu, 1999). According to many reliable sources, the highest recorded number of displacements in Nigeria can be attributed to the Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast where a spate of violent attacks since 2009 has led to the displacement of over two million people within and across the borders of neighbouring countries such as Niger, Chad and Cameroon (Adamu & Rasheed, 2016; Mohammed, 2017; United Nations High Commission for Refugees, 2017). Lately too, conflict between migrant herders and sedentary farmers which is mainly being fought in Nigeria’s north central zone has become petrifying, accounting for over 5,000 deaths and more than 1.5 million displacements (Akov, 2017).

In Benue state for instance, the resurgence of the conflict has created a serious internal displacement crisis that has forced several thousands of people to flee their homelands in towns such as Maiduguri in the northeast and Makurdi in the north central zone has become petrifying, accounting for over 5,000 deaths and more than 1.5 million displacements (Akov, 2017). Lately too, conflict between migrant herders and sedentary farmers which is mainly being fought in Nigeria’s north central zone has become petrifying, accounting for over 5,000 deaths and more than 1.5 million displacements (Akov, 2017). Lately too, conflict between migrant herders and sedentary farmers which is mainly being fought in Nigeria’s north central zone has become petrifying, accounting for over 5,000 deaths and more than 1.5 million displacements (Akov, 2017). Lately too, conflict between migrant herders and sedentary farmers which is mainly being fought in Nigeria’s north central zone has become petrifying, accounting for over 5,000 deaths and more than 1.5 million displacements (Akov, 2017). Lately too, conflict between migrant herders and sedentary farmers which is mainly being fought in Nigeria’s north central zone has become petrifying, accounting for over 5,000 deaths and more than 1.5 million displacements (Akov, 2017).

In Benue state for instance, the resurgence of the conflict has created a serious internal displacement crisis that has forced several thousands of people to flee their homelands in Guma, Logo, Agatu, Gwer West, Gwer East and Makurdi local government areas of the state for fear of impending herder attacks. Since 2012, towns such as Maiduguri in the northeast and Makurdi in the north central have witnessed an influx of IDPs some of...
whom are holed up in camps provided by government while others are absorbed by their extended families within capital towns. In the same period, the Niger Delta conflict - driven mainly by the struggle for oil rents - has led to several hundred deaths as well as a wave of mass displacements (Aghedo & Osumah, 2012). In Plateau state, the recurring indigene-settler problem in Jos continues to trigger a mass exodus of people away from the state. Notably too, the spiraling bandit violence in the northwest especially in Zamfara and Katsina states is not only stoking fear in the inhabitants but is also forcing a large number of people to move away from the troubled areas as a survival strategy. The frequency of these dastardly attacks has created palpable tension in many communities in Nigeria and thus led to the forced migration of people from their homelands to safer locations.

Since 2013, Nigeria has experienced an unprecedented amount of internal displacement due mainly to the Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast, prompting the country to be placed among the top ten countries with the highest number of IDPs, more than in any other African country (Mohammed, 2017). At a point, the insurgency in the northeast became so intense that in 2015 alone, Nigeria had an estimated 700,000 IDPs and was ranked fifth amongst countries with the highest number of IDPs globally (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2020). In 2016, the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) estimated the total number of IDPs at 2,155,618 across 13 states in Nigeria (cited in Mohammed, 2017). Of this number, an estimated 1,770,444 IDPs were reported to be victims of the Boko Haram conflict in the northeast alone. Although Nigeria is a signatory to the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of IDPs, otherwise known as the Kampala Convention, and other international frameworks, this has not reflected in the crisis response policy of the country either due to non-adoption. In the absence of an effective policy framework on the management of IDPs in Nigeria, the response to the plight of IDPs has essentially been abysmal and uncoordinated. The response to the root causes of internal displacements has also been largely disappointing (Ladan, 2013).

Yet in Nigeria, little research focuses on the question of what impact internal displacement has on the electoral process in a country where conflict-induced migrations occur frequently, especially during electioneering cycles. This article attempts to bridge the gap by drawing evidence from the Boko-Haram and the farmers-herdsmen clashes which, according to many reliable sources, have been responsible for most of the conflict-induced displacements of people in Nigeria over the last decade.

**Conceptual and Analytical Review**

Article 1(k) of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of IDPs, otherwise known as the Kampala Convention, defines IDPs as ‘persons or group 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 natural disasters, who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border (African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of IDPs in Africa, 2009). While there is a strong consensus among writers that IDPs are more vulnerable compared to refugees who enjoy legal protection of the UN Refugee Convention, there is less unanimity on the actual impact of forced displacements. For example, Brun’s study on Sri Lanka shows that the emergence of IDPs as a social category during and after the country’s civil war, created problems of citizenship and protracted the problem of internal displacement. Similarly, in
1991 and 1997, pre-election violence in Kenya produced over 400,000 IDPs. As of 2009, Kenya accounted for the highest number of IDPs in East Africa, with over 1 million displacements (Kamungi, 2009). It was also reported that resource conflicts and corruption had contributed in given vent to violent-induced displacements during election cycles in Africa (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2016).

In Nigeria, the IDPs challenge has been fueled by the Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast, herders-farmers crisis in the middle belt, banditry in the northwest, as well as sporadic communal violence and natural disasters (i.e. flooding), throughout the country (Rushing, 2015). As of 31 December, 2019, The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2020) puts the total number of persons displaced in Nigeria at 2,583,000. The crisis of IDPs has triggered the debate on IDPs voting, with scholars arguing that they, like other citizens, should be included in the visioning of electoral participation (Adewale, 2016; Bukar, 2012). Consequently, some principles have been put in place to safeguard IDPs voting. Globally, the United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights amongst others guarantees the rights of IDPs to electoral participation. Regionally, the Kampala Convention and the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights also protects the rights of IDPs to vote in Africa. In Nigeria, the rights of IDPs are guaranteed by the 1999 constitution and the National Policy on IDPs (Bukar, 2012).

Overview of Internal Displacement in Nigeria

The problem of internal displacement of people is not a particularly new phenomenon in Nigeria. In fact, the country has faced one crisis after the other since it attained independence in 1960 (Adewale, 2016). In the last 60 years of independence, the highest numbers of incidences of internal displacement in Nigeria have been triggered by violent conflict. The first incidence can be traced back to the civil war, also known as the Biafra war which reportedly left over 2 million people displaced or in need of humanitarian assistance (Orji & Uebari, 2013). From September to the end of October 1966, over one million displaced victims of the northern pogrom were evacuated from the north to the south in just a period of one month (Mohammed, 2017). In 1991, when the federal capital was moved from Lagos to Abuja, the new federal capital territory was carved out of the present day Nassarawa, Niger and Kogi states. The indigenous inhabitants mainly the Gbagis lost their lands as a result of the massive infrastructural transformation in the area. More than 300,000 inhabitants of over 600 villages were identified for resettlement within the FCT, a scenario which led to the establishment of satellite towns such as Kubwa, Dei-Dei, Wasa, Apo and Galuwyi/Shere (Mohammed, 2017).

Although incidents of inter-communal/inter-ethnic conflicts have been recorded in almost all states of the Nigerian federation, the majority of such clashes that led to notable internal displacements occurred in Benue, Taraba, Plateau, and Nassarawa states between 2000 and 2002. These clashes were mainly propelled by issues of land, boundaries and indigene/settlers. Also, between 2000 and 2002, over 30, 000 people were reportedly displaced in Kaduna state due to religion-related riots. In 2008, disputed local government elections in Jos north LGA of Plateau state produced serious inter-communal violence which pitted the predominantly Christian indigenes (The Berom, Anaguta and Afizere) against settlers from the Hausa-Fulani speaking Muslim north (Idahosa & Akov, 2013). Between 2003 and 2008, the National Commission for Refugees estimated that at
least 3.2 million persons had been displaced due to ethnic, communal and religious violence in Nigeria (Mberu & Pongou, 2010).

Furthermore, in August 2008 following many years of dispute and a ruling by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 2002, Nigeria ceded the Bakassi Peninsula to Cameroun. An estimated 400,000-755,000 people were reportedly displaced in the process, with many forced to move across the borders of Cross River and Akwa Ibom states as well as other Niger Delta areas. Presently, there are approximately 100,000 persons that are yet to be resettled since the Bakassi peninsula was ceded. Notably too, natural disasters such as flooding and resource degradation engendered by climatic variability have caused the internal displacements of thousands of Nigerians. In its 2013 annual report, the Nigerian Red Cross Society stated that “heavy rains between July and October 2012, led to Nigeria’s worst flooding in 40 years affecting more than 7 million people in 33 out of 36 states (Mohammed 2017, p.11). Some of the states that were torched by the floods include Benue, Cross River, Taraba, Niger and Kano states among others.

Other factors such as inequitable distribution of resources, lack of job opportunities, natural disasters, unfavourable weather conditions and poverty are also forcing thousands of people to migrate from their homelands to other locations in Nigeria. According to the findings derived from a survey carried out by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) on youth migration, 48.5 per cent of youths migrate from their home state due to family reasons; 22.9 per cent move in search of job opportunities; 26 per cent due to conflict and civil unrest; 9.2 per cent due to education and 4.8 per cent due to employment (NBS, 2012). These non-violence related factors have contributed immensely in causing people to move from their homelands as they go in search of better living conditions. If the conditions in their indigenous communities were favourable, perhaps they would not have been on the move. The implication of these somewhat involuntary migrations propelled mainly by the desire to escape hardships is that it inevitably impacts on the extent to which such persons are able to effectively participate in the governance process of the states or localities from which they hail. The import of this development on Nigeria’s democratization efforts cannot be overemphasized.

The incidence that has arguably produced the most number of IDPs in Nigeria is the Boko-Haram insurgency in the northeast which has caused over two million people to be displaced within and across the borders of Nigeria. Closely followed by the insurgency in terms of scale of displacement is the relatively less publicized but equally destructive farmers-herdsmen menace which has led to an estimated 1.5 million displacements and continues to ravage most parts of Nigeria especially the north central zone. These two conflicts have created a wave of complex emergencies and led to catholic apprehension across the length and breathe of Nigeria. Given the centrality of the two conflicts in the discussion on IDPs and democratization in Nigeria, there is need to discuss them in some detail emphasizing on their origins, dynamics and scale of displacement.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is underscored by the assumptions of democracy which can be traced back to the writings of such western theorists as Aristotle, John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, amongst others. Critical to the tenets of democracy is its emphasis on majoritarian rule and the efficacy of the electoral process. In this sense, Steinmetz (2019) argues that in any given political community, individuals or people normally lie at the heart of democracy because with them rests the power to elect and remove leaders. Democracy as ‘rule by the
people’ therefore, is expected to guarantee that all citizens participate in determining the actions of states, public policy, laws as well as the choice of leaders. Consequently, democracy confers on citizens the power to give political leaders the right to rule through periodic elections. In conflict-prone nascent democracies like Nigeria, spiraling internal violence is fueling the displacements of potential voters from their homelands to other places, and thereby threatening democracy’s majoritarian polemic. Such displacements invariably lead to widespread disenfranchisement and consequently, disputed electoral outcomes that have undermined the integrity of many elections (Mooney & Jarrah, 2005).

However, amongst the many principles which make democracy such an attractive form of government, the right to participation arguably contributes most to the enhancement of electoral integrity. Accordingly, it can be argued that the rising trend of IDPs who are often victims of violent conflicts in Nigeria, does not only disenfranchise eligible voters, but also undermines the integrity of the country’s electoral process. Thus, enhancing participation through conflict mitigation is crucial for improving the quality of any country’s electoral process. Relatedly, incorporating IDPs into the voting process is central to fulfilling this rudimentary requirement of democracy (i.e. participation) and hence, strengthening election integrity in Nigeria.

IDPs and the 2015 General Elections

Violence and social unrest continues to pose serious threats to the legitimacy of state and federal elections in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic (Human Rights Watch, 2003). As of February 2015, over 1.5 million people were living in IDPs camps across north-eastern Nigeria and parts of the north central zone due to violence (Rushing, 2015). Many IDPs had either lost their voters’ cards (PVCs) in flight or were unable to register/re-register as required, in their ward of residency. Thus, there were fears that the Boko Haram insurgency and herders-farmers violence could prevent voting in parts of the northeast and north central respectively. It was evident that failure to conduct elections in those conflict-ravaged areas that were believed to be the All Progressives Congress (APC) strongholds would inevitably create the grounds for the rejection of the poll results. In the circumstances, INEC postponed the elections by six weeks to allow the security agencies arrest the situation, with a view to enabling the IDPs return to their wards to vote (ICG, 2015). Although INEC assured that IDPs who were re-registered for voting in designated camps would be able to vote, over 90 per cent of IDPs are believed to be quartered by relatives and sympathizers where they had little access to re-registration, talk less of voting (Rushing, 2015).

Besides, the framework for voting by IDPs developed by INEC, and which led to the amendment of the Electoral Act (2010) was difficult to implement due to obvious challenges that are associated with identifying and separating intra-state IDPs from inter-state IDPs. The framework had provided that intra-state IDPs can vote in both governorship and presidential elections, while inter-state IDPs can only participate in the presidential polls (INEC, 2020). The 2015 presidential elections were eventually conducted on March 28, 2015. The breakdown of the election results showed that the candidate of the APC, Major General Muhammadu Buhari (Rtd) won in 21 states of the federation with 15,424,921 votes while President Goodluck Jonathan of the PDP polled 12,853,162 votes, winning in 15 states (Olowojolu & Ake, 2015, p. 15). The general voter turnout in the presidential poll across the country was put at 43.65 per cent, which is quite low by every standard. It is also unclear if
a reasonable percentage of IDPs were able to vote, and therefore included in this figure.

Table 1: Voter turnout in the 2015 General elections in Nigeria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Presidential Election</th>
<th>Parliamentary Election</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of Registered voters</td>
<td>67,422,005</td>
<td>67,422,005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>181,562,056</td>
<td>181,562,056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total votes cast</td>
<td>29,432,083</td>
<td>29,432,083</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invalid votes (%)</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voter turnout (%)</td>
<td>43.65</td>
<td>43.65</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance [IDEA], 2020

The data in the above table shows that only 43.65 per cent of the registered voters cast their votes during the 2015 presidential and parliamentary elections. While several factors such as apathy, poor planning, initial postponement of the elections etc. could have contributed to the low turnout in the election, insecurity is arguably the main reason for the development. This conclusion is predicated on available data which indicates that the Boko-Haram insurgency alone has accounted for more than two million displacements since 2009 (Mohammed, 2017). Despite claims by the military that Boko-Haram has been decimated, there are reports of frequent attacks by the dreaded sect on military bases and civilian populations including incidents of kidnappings, preventing autochthons from going out to cast their votes.

Moreover, with several communities having been reportedly sacked by rampaging herdsmen especially in the north central zone in 2014, results of the 2015 general elections obtained from such conflict zones have come under scrutiny. Over 1.5 million persons were reported to have been displaced from their towns and villages during this period due to herdsmen-farmers violence in Nigeria (Akov, 2017). Abdulbarkindo and Alupsen (2017) aver that while the 2015 polls reportedly held in this conflict ravaged areas, there is great doubts as to the authenticity of the electoral outcomes since majority of the registered voters in the area had since fled. Clearly, the welter of controversies surrounding the conduct of elections in conflict-ravaged areas is undermining national cohesion and complicating the prospects for credible elections in Nigeria.

IDPs and the 2019 General Elections

Apart from the legion of displacements occasioned by the well-publicized Boko-Haram insurgency, in 2018, herdsmen-farmers relations degenerated into serious violence in Nigeria, leading to the displacement of over 300,000 people in the first half of that year alone (ICG, 2018). The disturbing statistics emanating from violent incidents in Benue, Nassarawa and Plateau states in the north central zone as well as in some parts of Taraba and Adamawa states cast doubts on the credibility of the 2019 polls results emanating from the conflict affected areas. In Benue state for instance, whole communities in parts of Guma, Logo and Makurdi were forced to flee and thousands of the displaced persons are at April, 2020 still taking refuge in camps provided by the state government. In fact, many people are said to have been unable to either register to vote or collect their PVCs due to the insecurity that devastated their communities (ICG, 2018).
Table 2: Voter turnout in the 2019 General elections in Nigeria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Presidential election</th>
<th>Parliamentary election</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of Registered voters</td>
<td>82,344,107</td>
<td>82,344,107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>208,679,114</td>
<td>208,679,114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total votes cast</td>
<td>28,614,190</td>
<td>28,614,190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invalid votes (%)</td>
<td>4.51</td>
<td>4.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voter turnout (%)</td>
<td>34.75</td>
<td>34.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: IDEA, 2020

Borno, the state worst hit by the Boko Haram carnage, with a population of 4,171,104 according to the 2006 census figures reportedly witnessed low turn-outs in the 2019 elections, recording just over a million actual voters in the polls. Similarly, Benue, the epicenter of the farmers-herdsmen conflict in Nigeria, has also experienced low turn outs, especially in the most affected LGAs of Guma, Logo and Gwer west. While conflict-induced displacement may not be the only reason for these developments, it has arguably contributed immensely in inhibiting political participation, as IDPs are increasingly finding it difficult to get involved in the governance process in their localities. Although there have been reports of a return home of some displaced persons (Mohammed, 2017), the reality is that majority of the displaced persons are still taking refuge in camps or among kin in safer locations. The implication of this on the electoral process has been truly damning as majority of persons in conflict zones are no longer able to influence electoral outcomes or decide how, and by whom they are governed.

The 2019 general elections, conducted after a wave of violent conflicts across the country recorded the lowest rate of voter turnout of 34.75 per cent since the return to democracy in 1999. The rate of voter turnout is derived as a percentage of the total number of registered voters and the total number of votes cast (including valid and rejected ballots) that are obtained in an election. Remarkably, the rate of voter turnout in the 2019 general elections in Nigeria was also reported to be the lowest of all recent elections conducted in Africa, according to IDEA (2020), this development is not unconnected to the threat to lives that has generally beclouded the Nigerian space in recent times, especially with reports of violence erupting in a number of places during and after elections.

**Recommendations: Towards Curbing Violence-induced IDPs Crisis**

The interplay of different factors has shaped the Boko Haram and the herdsmen-farmers conflict in Nigeria. Impunity, unemployment, climate change, rapid growth of militias, weak security institutions and ethno-religious tensions are often identified by writers as having precipitated herdsmen-farmers clashes. More specifically, this decades-long conflict is linked to environmental degradation in the far north and encroachment upon traditional grazing routes in the Middle Belt; militia attacks; the poor government response to distress calls and failure to punish past perpetrators. New laws banning open grazing in Benue and Taraba states also served to worsen the conflict. In like manner, unemployment, the almajiri phenomenon, state repression, poverty, alienation and the inability of the state to intercept conflicts early on and prevent their escalation, are said to have engendered the Boko Haram insurgency. There is no doubt the unprecedented escalation of conflict has inevitably polarized Nigerians along ethnic, religious and regional fault lines. While the factors that led to the emergence of these conflicts are diverse, what is clear is that the profound challenges plaguing the country
need to be effectively addressed if peace and good governance is to be achieved.

The reality is that it is impossible to bring IDPs into the voting net, as INEC has unsuccessfully tried to do in recent times due to the many legal constraints that this poses, not to mention that many IDPs are taking refuge among kin in safer locations and not in designated camps, making it more difficult to get them to vote. What is required therefore is sustainable peace, the absence of which makes genuine democratic outcomes unrealizable. To end the Boko Haram and herders-farmers killings and ensure a smooth and lasting return of IDPs to their homelands to create room for more inclusive democratic participation, the federal government needs to take some proactive steps.

First, there is an urgent need to increase government presence by deploying more security personnel to states that are most vulnerable to violent attacks such as Benue, Nassarawa, Taraba, Borno, Yobe and Adamawa. As a short-term measure, some security agents stationed in less-volatile states should be redeployed to the troubled areas, including police officers attached to politicians and other privileged elite. They should be properly trained and provided with sufficient arms and patrol vehicles to effectively police the area, including the difficult terrains. Security agencies should also be urged to improve on their intelligence gathering through closer engagement with local residents, so as to better predict and intercept impending attacks.

Second, Nigeria needs to strengthen international engagement with countries that have the financial and technical capacity for dealing with terrorism and other forms of insecurity with a view to obtaining support to mitigate the ongoing violence in the country. Similarly too, influential states such as the United States, United Kingdom, European Union and Canada should pressurize President Buhari to act more decisively and transparently to end the killings. Apart from increasing assistance, humanitarian agencies should also ensure to provide the Nigerian government with the needed technical support on ways to more effectively mitigate the on-going killings and arrest the IDPs challenge in the country.

Third, limited opportunities for legitimate livelihood have made young people susceptible to recruitment into pursuing violent causes. The high rate of poverty amongst youths in Nigeria especially in the far North has caused young people to be propagated and recruited to fight insurgent causes. Thus, state and federal authorities must commit to creating more jobs for the teeming population, as a top priority. Northern politicians should also be persuaded to work harder to develop the region, as a way of intercepting criminality and insurgency. This would help engage more youths and therefore reduce the incentive for insurgent causes and other forms of violent acts.

And fourth, Nigeria should work with Cameroon, Chad and Niger (the Lake Chad Basin countries) to regulate movements of people and weapons across borders, especially of cattle rustlers, armed herders and other unscrupulous persons whose activities are aggravating internal tensions in and around Nigeria. In the past, lack of commitment on the part of the Lake Chad Basin countries to work out a more collaborative counter-insurgency strategy has fueled violence within and across the borders of states in the region. Accordingly, more regional efforts are required. Failure to respond collectively and decisively will spell the perpetuation of deadly conflict, and by extension, the IDPs crises in Nigeria and the surrounding nations.

Concluding Remarks

Identifying and extinguishing the causes of herders-farmers violence, the Boko-Haram insurgency and other forms of conflict is
critical to ending the IDPs crisis and strengthening the efficacy of electoral democracy in Nigeria. Notably, scholarly research on IDPs in Nigeria has focused more on exploring the effects of conflict-induced displacements on the economy and livelihoods, and not on its impact on electoral outcomes and the quality of democracy. Research projects attempting to investigate conflicts that have triggered a wave of population displacements must understand that such displacements have hurt the electoral process and impinged on Nigeria's quest for genuine democratization.

Thus, understanding the background to the recent disputes over electoral outcomes especially those emanating from conflict ravaged areas also requires an understanding that the forced migration of people due to a conflict inadvertently prevents them from fulfilling one of the most critical requirements of liberal democracy which is exercise of franchise. As more people become displaced from their homelands as a result of conflict, the tendency to question the authenticity of electoral outcomes increases. The Boko Haram and herders-farmers conflicts for instance have led to the displacement of an estimated 2 million and 1.5 million people respectively, over the past decade. Many more displacements allegedly go unnoticed or unreported (Adamu & Rasheed, 2016). This, along with the several other problems plaguing election conduct in Nigeria, have stifled participation and undermined the legitimacy of electoral outcomes.

In this regard, ending impunity, disbanding militias, controlling arms inflow, encouraging dialogue between conflict parties, punishing perpetrators, equipping the security agencies, creating employment and making a remarkable dent on poverty are some of the crucial steps that need to be taken to intercept violent conflicts. Addressing these conflict-inducing challenges can help discourage conflict onsets, curb forced migration and better enhance democratic participation and the authenticity of electoral outcomes in Nigeria.

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