

Internal Displacement and its Implications on Nigeria's Democratic Process

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Abstract

The increase in the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) globally on daily basis has generated a lot of concern among governments of the different countries concerned. In Nigeria, the number of IDPs is on the increase due to insurgency, banditry, conflicts and flooding. The main objective of this study is to examine internal displacement in Nigeria and how it affects the democratic process. The study was anchored on the Democratic Participatory Theory. The study is qualitative and, as a result, utilised the secondary sources of data. It was found that factors like armed conflicts and natural disasters were responsible for internal displacements in Nigeria. It was also revealed that internal displacements affect the electoral process in such areas like voting and lack of opportunity to make informed choices. The paper concludes that internal displacement is an unpleasant situation that impacts negatively on the electoral process in Nigeria. It recommends that leaders at different levels in Nigeria should stop promoting conflicts among different ethnic groups in the country so as to ameliorate the menace of internal displacement.

Keywords: Conflicts, Democracy, Electoral process, Internal displacement, Voting.

Introduction

Globally, internal displacement has become a source of concern to the victims and governments of some states. That the history of internally displaced persons is an history of struggle is not an overstatement. More often than not, displaced persons always strive for the basic necessities of life like food, water, clothing and protection against abuse. The plights of internally displaced persons have become worrisome because of the number of people involved. As posited by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in its 2019 reports, there

were 70.8 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) globally (Cited in Roberts, 2020). This figure was a little higher than that of Huan and Graham (2019) who asserted that the number of forcibly displaced people in the world amounted to 68.5 million, while about 40 million migrated as a result of conflicts. As Huan and Graham (2019), observed, there are also millions that have other factors accountable for their displacement, such as disasters, economic instability, and development projects. Suffice it to say that majority of the IDPs are found in developing democracies. Precisely, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) of Geneva reported in 2019 that within the African region, Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) had 16.5 million displaced persons.

Over the years, the number of forcibly displaced persons has increased in Africa. As Wendy (2019) observed, African migration to Europe is on the increase based on the phenomenon of forced displacement. He further reiterated that based on record, more than 1.6 million Africans have been forcibly displaced in each year right from 2014. It is also a fact that two-third of the forcibly displaced Africans, which amounts to about 17 million people, are residents in their own country (Wendy, 2019). This no doubt that person displacement is on the high side to both Africans and non-Africans. The fact that the issue of IDPs has become a source of concern even in Nigeria can be seen in the fact that between 1st January and 31st December, 2018, Nigeria recorded 613,000 new displacements associated with disasters and within the same period, it has 541,000 new displacements due to conflicts and violence (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre – IDMC, 2019). As at 31st December, 2018, the total number of IDPs arising from conflicts and violence amounted to 2,216,000 (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre – IDMC, 2019). The commencement of internal displacement in Nigeria can be traced back to the period of the Civil War (1967-1970). The War led to the demise of about 2 million people with about 10 million internally displaced (Global IDP Project, 2002). As part of findings, it has been revealed that Nigeria, in 2012, witnessed large scale, unprecedented floods in 33 states that affected over 7 million people (Abubakar, 2019).

The issue of IDPs, no doubt, had affected the democratic process especially in the Fourth Republic. This is because of the large number of people involved. The challenges of IDPs had impacted negatively on voting, the conduct of election and input into governance in form of suggestions. It is imperative to mention that extant studies on internal displacement in Nigeria are mainly on health and environmental conditions of the people. Not many works on internal

displacement were thus related to the Nigeria's democratic process. It is in view of this that this study examines internal displacement and its implication for the democratic process in Nigeria.

The main objective of this paper is to examine internal displacement and the democratic process. The specific objectives are to examine: (i) the reasons for internal displacement of persons in Nigeria, and (ii) how democratic process is being affected by internal displacement in Nigeria.

Problematic and Methodology

Internal displacements have become a recurring decimal overtime in some countries. Suffice to say that most of the cases of displacement have been due to armed conflicts and civil wars that made the helpless civilians move in search of safe havens. According to the information provided by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), between 1st January and 31st December, 2019, Nigeria recorded new displacements due to disasters totalling 157,000. Within the same period, the country had 248,000 new displacements due to conflicts and violence. This no doubt calls for concern.

Internal displacements had served as an impediment to Nigerian democratic process. This is in the sense that internally displaced persons often find it difficult to exercise their franchise or stand as candidates for political offices in the camps where they are resident. Even where they have the opportunity to participate in the electoral process, they are often vulnerable to manipulations such as vote-buying and political thuggery than those who are not displaced. The research methodology adopted in this study is qualitative, since it involves the use of secondary sources of data like textbooks, newspapers, magazines and online materials. In addition, the personal experience of the writer, being a Nigerian and an active observer of Nigerian politics, bears on the conclusion arrived at in the study.

Conceptual Clarification

The two concepts that are explained are Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and democracy.

Internally Displaced Person (IDPs):

Internally Displaced Persons can be seen as persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual

residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognised state border (Adeola, 2019). The implication of this definition is that there is a force that propelled the movement of people, which can be armed conflict or violence within a particular country. This is unlike the case of refugees whose movements are usually out of their country, that is, they have to cross borders and are no more under the protection of their government. IDPs are products of conflicts among groups in a country. IDPs are very much rampant in developing countries like Nigeria that manifests ethnicity and low political culture. Thus, internally displaced persons are persons who had had cause to leave their comfort zones, that is, houses and community for other places due to attacks or anticipated attacks on them.

Democracy:

Democracy is a concept that has been defined in various ways by scholars, politicians and opinion leaders. As observed, the word ‘democracy’ originated in ancient Greek. It is coined from two Greek words, *demos* which means (people) and *kratia* meaning (rule). In a literal sense, the word means the ‘rule of the people’ (Ujo, 2004; Johari, 2013). Abraham Lincoln, as cited in Johari (2013, p. 13) defined democracy as “the government of the people, by the people and for the people”. In the words of Bryla, as cited by Agarwal (2014, p. 264), democracy is a form of government that have the ruling power vested in the members of the community. A. V. Dicey, in his write up, perceived democracy as a form of government that has majority of the people governing in a state (Agarwal, 2014, p. 264). From these definitions, it can be seen that democracy involves the people ruling through their elected representatives. Those that govern in the real sense of it are also in the minority. Schumpeter (1967; as cited in Ujo, 2004, p. 4) defines democracy as “institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a comparative struggle for the people’s votes”. This means democracy involves competition for power among candidates desiring to contest the elections.

Democracy is of two types, direct and indirect. Direct democracy which existed among the Greeks was such that decisions of the state are reached by the people when they assemble or hold a meeting instead of taking decisions through a group of representatives (Johari, 2013). A modern form of democracy is the one introduced in the modern age based on the revolution in England in 1688 and

the America's declaration of independence in 1776 known as representative government or representative democracy (Johari, 2013). It implies that governance is such that power is fused in the people and assigned to elected representatives (Johari, 2013). The essential ingredients of democracy are equality, responsibility, participation, and accountability. From the researcher's personal point of view, democracy can be seen as the rule of the people through their elected representatives.

Theoretical Framework

The theory that is considered appropriate for this paper is the democratic participatory theory. Jean-Jacque Roseau developed the modern version of the theory in the 18th century and this was later promoted by John Stuart Mill and G. D. H. Cole, who opined that, in a just society, political participation is indispensable. However, as Pieterse (2001) observed, since the 1970s participatory democracy has been an attractive word used to depict genuine, popular or gradual democratisation.

Participatory democracy is a process that involves collective decision-making and combines both direct and indirect democracy. Representative democracy gives the citizens the opportunity to decide on policy proposals of the political leaders and take active role in policy implementation. With representative democracy, politicians have little opportunity for the use of their discretion in policy issues. The extent to which citizens can influence policy and determine social priorities is directly in line with the degree to which they choose to involve themselves in the process (Aragones and Sanchez-pages, 2009). With participatory democracy the citizens have the opportunity of governing themselves through voting and public discussion and enhanced equality.

The participatory democratic theory has been criticised on the basis of the fact that, in Nigeria, there is no respect for the rule of law and basic rights of the individual, contrary to the tenets of the theory (Ujomu & Olatunji, 2014). In addition, citizens' rights are more often than not violated by some individuals and law enforcement agents. The relevance of the theory to this study can be seen in the fact that internally displaced persons are supposed to be involved in the democratic process of their country, based on the fact that they are part of the citizenry.

Reasons for Displacement

It has been realised that all over the world people are displaced within their countries for various reasons. The following are some of the reasons for internal displacement:

- i. **Armed Conflicts:** Conflict exists as a major reason for displacement of people, especially in developing countries like Guinea, Liberia, Sierra-Leone and Cote d'Ivoire (Kellenberger, 2009). These armed conflicts had led to the loss of properties, lives and livelihoods in the countries concerned, Nigeria inclusive. In Nigeria, humanitarian crisis witnessed in Adamawa, Yobe and Borno States had split into Lake Chad and had resulted to the displacement of about 1.9 million people in the North East, 80 per cent are women and children (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2019). The number of IDPs had increased to about 2.5 million in 2020 in North Eastern part of Nigeria (UNCHR, n.d). Since 2009 when the Boko Haram insurgency commenced, the terrorists on continuous basis have launched attacks on the people. Apart from the estimated number of internally displaced, it had also been estimated that over 30,000 people have lost their lives. Table 1 below shows the causes of displacement in the North-East, Nigeria.

Table 1:
Percentage of IDPs by Reasons of Displacement

Cause of Displacement	Percentage of Total
Ongoing conflicts	94.1%
Communal clashes	5.8%
Natural disasters	0.1%
Total	100.0

Source: Displacement Tracking Matrix DTM Round 23 Report – June 2018

The implication of Table 1 above is that armed conflicts are more important in causing internal displacement than natural disasters.

Table 2:

Number of internally displaced persons in Nigeria (2009 – 2021)

Year	Conflict Internal Displacements	Disaster Internal Displacements	Total	% of Conflicts
2009	5,000	140,000	145,000	3.45
2010	5,000	560,000	565,000	0.88
2011	65,000	6,300	71,300	91.16
2012	63,000	3,894,000	3,957,000	1.59
2013	471,000	117,000	588,000	80.10
2014	975,000	3,000	978,000	99.69
2015	737,000	100,000	837,000	88.05
2016	501,000	78,000	579,000	86.53
2017	279,000	122,000	401,000	69.58
2018	541,000	613,000	1,154,000	46.88
2019	248,000	157,000	405,000	61.23
2020	169,000	279,000	448,000	37.72
2021	376,000	24,000	400,000	94.00
Total	4,435,000	6,093,300	10,528,300	42.12

Source: Uduu, O. (2022)

From Table 2 above, it would also be seen that the number of people displaced by conflicts in 2009 was 5,000 and same figure of 5,000 was for 2010. The figure increased to 65,000 in 2011, which is an indication that conflicts accounted for 1200% increase in the number of internally displaced persons in the country. Between 2013 and 2021, conflict displacement was over 60% apart from what we had in 2020, which was 37.7% (Uduu, 2022). The increase could be attributed to conflicts like farmer-herder clashes, Boko Haram insurgency, and kidnapping by bandits (Uduu, 2022). As Uduu (2022) further observed, the proportion of those displaced due to conflicts as against disasters was less than 4% in 2009 and 2010 respectively. However, the number rose sharply in 2011 to 91.6% and dropped to 1.59% in 2012 and rose sharply again from 2013 to 2021 with the exception of 2020 when it was 37.7%. It had also been realised that high disaster displacement as a result of flooding and storms was experienced in most parts of the country in 2012.

Table 3:

Number of internally displaced persons on state's basis in Nigeria

S/N	State	Number
1	Borno	1,630,284
2	Zamfara	678,000
3	Benue	300,000
4	Adamawa	208,334
5	Yobe	156,437
6	Niger	150,038
7	Katsina	130,113
8	Cross River	101,404
9	Ebonyi	93,404
10	Plateau	91,524
11	Taraba	82,661
12	Nasarawa	68,769
13	Bauchi	65,595
14	Imo	42,335
15	FCT	31,029
16	Kwara	25,024
17	Kogi	20,477
18	Kano	17,981
19	Bayelsa	12,292
20	Edo	11,716
21	Akwa Ibom	10,062
22	Oyo	8,912
23	Rivers	8,119
24	Ondo	7,012
25	Delta	6,172
26	Ogun	5,623
27	Ekiti	5,377

Source: Angbulu, S. (2022)

From Table 3 above on IDPs on state's basis in Nigeria, it would be seen that Borno State had the highest number of IDPs, while Ekiti State had the lowest number (Angbulu, 2022).

- ii. **Natural Disaster:** Another cause of displacement is natural disasters. Natural disasters are natural occurrences and communities that are affected have no control over them. The natural disasters are of various types. These include desertification, flooding, and erosion. Floods exist as the most common hazard that occurs naturally and are responsible for a larger number of fatalities often witnessed globally (Olanrewaju &

Chilkara, 2017). Floods have affected up to 8 billion people globally and caused over 200,000 deaths in the last three decades (Olanrewaju & Chikara, 2017). Apart from the Ogunpa flood of 2011 in Nigeria, states along the rivers Niger and Benue have also experienced floods in 2012 and 2017 respectively while the Niger Delta regions had their share in 2012 (Olanrewaju & Chilkara, 2017). Flooding is often made worse by inadequate drainage network in a city like Lagos and coupled with climatic change. When there is flooding, the affected individuals will have no choice than to evacuate their communities for safer areas. Desertification in Northern Nigeria also enhances displacement of persons. Desertification has become a serious issue threatening Northern Nigeria. States that are worse affected in the Northern part of Nigeria were once endowed with a large arable land that was useful for agriculture and some other activities.

- iii. **Inter-communal Clashes:** These exist in two dimensions. They are ethno-religious conflicts and farmers-herders' conflicts. Communal conflict is a type of conflict among non-state actors that are organised based on shared community identity (Brosche, 2015). In Taraba State, there had been inter-communal clashes between the Tivs and the Jukuns, which had led to displacements. The sources of the lingering crisis relate to indigene/settler issues, and lack of political will to tackle emerging security issues (Mac-Leva, Emmanuel & Hunkuyu, 2019). Initially, there existed peaceful relations between the Tivs and Jukuns which was on for centuries. However, the first incidence of violence between the two ethnic groups was in 1959 and this reoccurred in 1980, 1990, 2011 and 2019 respectively (Mac-Leva, Emmanuel & Hunkuyu, 2019). Suffice it to say that these clashes resulted in the formation of ethnic militias that led to the killing of about 600 persons in various acts of violence in the area (Mac-Leva, Emmanuel & Hunkuyu, 2019). In Benue State, there have been persistent clashes between farming communities and Fulani herdsman. The clashes bother on the struggle for natural resources, such as farmland, water routes in addition to grazing grounds. These are of high value to both parties. The clashes led to the death of over 1,300 people between January and December, 2018, while an estimated 300,000 people were forced to leave their homes. Farming activities have thus been adversely affected in a state that is often referred to as the food basket of the nation (Unah, 2018). In addition, Unah (2018) further

posited that as a result of the violence, a camp was provided at Gbajimba for about 24,000 displaced persons. The number of IDPs in Benue State is much, no doubt and it is also worth noting that attacks on selected villages are on a continuous basis taking its toll on the people's wellbeing.

- iv. **Indigene/Settler Conflicts:** This is another major reason for displacement in Nigeria. There are many incidences of indigene/settler conflicts in Nigeria like the Zango-Kataf crisis, Hausa/Fulani conflicts and the Barom/Anaguata/Afizere crisis in Jos (Nwagwu, 2016). The issues that brought about the conflicts were lack of access to economic opportunities, lingering fear of domination of one religious' sect by another, and accusation of marginalisation. For instance, it was alleged that, there was domination of the Katafi as aborigines by the Zaria Emirate (Nwagwu, 2016). All stakeholders were also making claims and counter claims of indigenship, while the polity was heated up by federal appointments in favour of the Hausa/Fulani settlers (Nwagwu, 2016). It has been emphasised that the federal government has important role to play as an umpire in most if not all the indigene/settler conflicts so as to foster peace and security and thus prevent further displacement of persons.
- v. **Electoral Violence:** The importance of electoral violence in human displacement in developing countries like Nigeria cannot be overemphasised. Electoral violence dates back to the post-colonial period in Nigeria during the 1964 federal elections and the 1965 western regional elections. The electoral process was engrossed in great violence, intimidation, harassment, kidnappings and assassinations of political opponents (Gberevbie & Oni, 2014). This resulted in the internal displacement of a large number of people.

Internal Displacement and its Implications on Nigeria's Democratic Process.

The negative effects of internal displacement on the democratic process in Nigeria cannot be overemphasised. They are as enumerated below:

- i. **Voting Right and Right to Contest for Political Offices:** A large number of internally displaced persons have lost their rights to vote and contest elections in Nigeria and these are vital aspects of the democratic process. As Adzande (2019) pointed out, during the 2015 general

elections, voting was considered in only three states in the North East of Nigeria, namely, Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe. Also, in the 2019 general elections, voting became a major issue for internally displaced persons, due to widespread displacement, the large number of displaced persons and the loss of voters' cards between 2016 and 2018 (Adzande, 2019). This assertion was based on interviews conducted with internally displaced persons, and the tremendous rise in the number of displaced persons has been attributed primarily to conflicts. Though the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) embarked on sensitisation drive from August 2018 to January, 2019, in designated IDPs camps, and displaced persons were registered and issued temporary voter's cards, a large number of IDPs in Benue State were unable to register. Those in camps outside the states where they registered were only allowed by INEC to participate in the presidential elections in order to minimise difficulties encountered in conducting the elections (Adzande, 2019). In a similar vein, some IDPs across Nigeria living in camps during the 2023 general elections were disenfranchised based on their inability to access their Personal Voter's Cards replaced by INEC while polling booths were not also provided (Habib, 2023). These no doubt impact negatively on the political development of the country and specifically the democratic process.

- ii. **Loss of Opportunity to make Informed Choices:** In most cases, displaced voters lack the opportunity to make informed choices from among competing candidates. This is because of their lack of knowledge of those contesting for elections and also, lack of knowledge of the manifestoes of the candidates' political parties. They also do not have access to the media and information in making choices and as a result, their choices are tilted towards those that visit them in the camps, who decide to contest for elections (Adzande, 2019). This is an indication that some prospective political office holders are often far from the people in the IDPs camps in Nigeria. This no doubt impact negatively on the democratic process in Nigeria.
- iii. **Lack of Adherence to the Rule of Law:** The rule of law implies that individuals are seen as equal before the law and enjoy their fundamental human rights. However, with regard to the IDPs, some of these rights are not being enjoyed or not enjoyed fully and sometimes they are

abused. For instance, in IDPs camps in Nigeria women and children (girls) are often subjected to rape by the caregivers or officials in the camps. As asserted by Human Rights Watch (2020), women and girls that were abused by some members of the security forces and the civilian Joint Task Force (JTF), found it difficult to report for fear of being deprived of certain privileges in the camps.

- iv. **Entrenchment of Poverty:** Poverty that is ravaging the camps of Internally Displaced Persons does not enhance democratic process. The chronic state of poverty that reinforced by mass unemployment among the internally displaced persons is a challenge to the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria (Kwasau, 2013). In a similar vein, Aka (in Kwasau, 2013) opined that, a society that is populated with beggars cannot be devoid of parasites and bandits. This implies that deprivation as reflected in abject poverty makes it difficult for the individuals to be effectively involved in the democratic process. In a report by Legal Defence and Assistance Project (LEDAP), a non-governmental organisation, it was reiterated that women and girls in the Boko Haram infested North-East are randomly raped in exchange for food and water in both the host communities and IDPs camps that are located in Adamawa, Borno, Yobe and Abuja (Inwalonhe, 2021). These acts no doubt are violations of human rights; enhanced by poverty.
- v. **Lack of Proper Documentation:** Lack of proper documentation is part of the challenges faced by the IDPs in Nigeria with its attendant implications for the electoral process. It was observed by the Protection Monitoring Group of United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) (2015) that the IDPs in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, Nigeria did not have documentation on account of losing their documents when they fled from crises. This thus, impact on the IDPs finding jobs, children attending schools and there is the possibility of them becoming stateless. The displacement of people in the North East and North Central parts of Nigeria led to the setting up of IDPs camps in the FCT. In a related development, the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons had disclosed that, out of the existing 3.2 million Internally Displaced Persons, scattered all over Nigeria, only

84,803 (2 per cent) were registered (Angbulu, 2022). It was in view of such situations that Solomon (2009) had earlier posited that, though, the rights of IDPs to vote is recognised by law, other impediments that may be legal, administrative and practical could make it difficult for the IDPs to take part in the electoral process.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study dwells on how internal displacements adversely had impacted on the democratic process in Nigeria, particularly in the Fourth Republic. As could be seen, internal displacement became prominent during Nigerian Civil War and has been unabated. The study found that armed conflicts and natural disasters play major roles in internal displacement in Nigeria. The study also realised that internal displacements have impacted on democratic process in the sphere of voting and contesting for political offices. Issues of logistics during elections and lack of proper documentation as a result of internal displacement had also affected the democratic process in Nigeria. From the observations and analysis above, it could be seen that internal displacement occurs based on different reasons like conflicts and climatic conditions. This implies that some of the reasons for displacement are man-made while others are natural, and the displaced persons have no control over them. It is equally imperative to realize that the issue of internal displacement often impacts on the democratic process in Nigeria such as voting rights and the right to contest for political offices, lack of opportunity to make informed choices and lack of adherence to the rule of law.

In order to avoid internal displacement and foster democracy, leaders at different levels should not be seen promoting conflicts among the different ethnic groups. This will enhance unity among the various ethnic groups and reduce the occurrence of conflicts. Adequate security should be provided for the IDPs camps. This would ward off or reduce frequent attacks by insurgents and miscreants. Responsible law enforcement agents should be posted to the IDP camps in order to avoid abuses of women and children and the abduction of these IDPs and officials of the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), providing succour for the displaced persons. The federal and state governments should put in place appropriate mechanisms to deal with abuses from official and unofficial quarters in the IDPs camps whenever they are experienced and reported. Internally displaced persons' participation in the election can be enhanced by

registering prospective voters at the internally displaced persons' camps ahead of elections and issuing them voters' cards on permanent or temporary basis.

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