

## Article for Book Review

### Book title: *Your Vote or Your Life?: Tracking the Tangible and Intangible Dangers in Nigeria's Electoral Politics*

Tayo Raymond Ezekiel Eegunlusi<sup>[a],\*</sup>

<sup>[a]</sup>Ph.D., Lecturer, Philosophy, General Studies Department, School of Sciences, Federal University of Technology, Akure, Ondo State, Nigeria.

\*Corresponding author.

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Author: Mike Omilusi, Ph.D.

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Mike Omilusi's wide educational and field experiences attest to his competence at addressing Nigeria's endemically violent elections. In this review, I examined the general structure of his work to ascertain whether he adequately addressed his chosen topic and set objectives. Though focused on election-related political and security issues, his work straddles moral, social, cultural and political affairs in Nigeria. Its ten chapters discussed extensively the causes of and solutions to personal and national security conflicts, state agencies' roles in security conflicts, ethnic conflicts and hegemonic dominances, electoral violence, electoral systems, social/distributive justice, political party conflicts and "hate speeches." It equally regurgitates on the media's roles in electoral reporting and conflicts, electoral stakeholders' violation of legal procedures, the interface between legal and moral angles to electoral regulations and political will, the links between actions of political gladiators, voters, observers and canvassers.

Besides these, the work dialogued on the role of

technology in Nigeria's elections and the irregularities of the 2015 General elections, reformation of electoral systems/methods, institutions affecting conducts of elections and electoral non-violence. It concluded that engaging in dialogue, advocacy and respecting the findings and recommendations of various fact-finding committees once put in place by the government will facilitate good conducts during elections and ensure electoral peace. In achieving his final objective, which is achieving non-violence in elections, as posited in his chapter ten which is the postscript, he insightfully discussed the various issues raised with relevant facts.

Obviously, with a style sharing common boundaries between theory and praxis, the work is content-rich and satisfied some technical adequacies. It conceptualised and developed certain rudimentary ideas as electioneering campaigns, elections, security, legal processes in elections, historical background of elections in Nigeria, party politics, governmental systems, citizenship electoral participation and contributions to electoral violence, technological voting, national and institutional integration and integrity, media integrity, ethnic conflicts and a host of other ideas and their relations to the sanctity of electoral conducts.

The work's significance does not just lie in identifying the causes of election violence in Nigeria and proffering solutions to them but engaging the causal, moral, cultural, socio-political and economic interfaces between the nation's multifarious problems. Thus, its linking electoral problems to moral and social vices, cultural conflicts, security conflicts, and deceptive and opportunistic hijacking of religions for vices in its discussion of electoral violence reflects keen and deep insights into Nigeria's problems. Though scholars proffered many solutions to these problems, extensive personal and institutional corruption and lack of moral will for social change debarred their adoption. The author's shedding of light on views that agitate academic and non-academic

minds makes the work's propensity for reaching wider audiences high. Any meaningful research work geared for national change must reach those who are affected by the issues it raises who decide on a daily basis in relation to its outcomes.

On a general note, the work intelligently and articulately combines a variety of conceptual perspectives in addressing election-related violence in Nigeria. In this light, I suppose that it will appeal to academic and non-academic persons alike, at both national and international levels, because of human interests in the transfer, control and retention of power. Drive towards control and retention of state power are central to Nigeria's numerous problems. All avenues to rig elections are then being employed as many electorates aid politicians to gain control of power because of immediate or future benefits. Thus, there is upsurge of violence as the protagonists make efforts to achieve their intentions. In civilised nations, elections are won by articulateness regarding clarity of visions, strong welfare agendas based on party manifestoes and originality of aspirants' intentions to help people realise socio-economic goals, among other things. Whereas Nigerians perceive goal-oriented articulateness disadvantageously, undermining it in favour of quick but worthless gains. This is why both the masses and power holders go to any extent to achieve their election-rigging goals.

The book's analysing cases of electoral procedures and aftermaths, election-provoked security breach and threats to life and properties, and a host of other election-related issues leave case studies for members of the academic community. In this, many fields in the sciences, social sciences and humanities, such as statistics, economics, anthropology, sociology, and social and political philosophy, will have enough observations to engage them. International organisations, electoral observers and international governmental agencies interested in the outcomes of conducts of elections in Nigeria will find a fertile ground for their observations and decisions while non-academic nationals wishing to satisfy their curiosity or understand technical, theoretical and historical issues in Nigeria's electioneering processes can productively engage their minds. Despite the strength of the books, there are observations to be taken very seriously.

In mentioning that the work intended to "fill some gaps in literature" (p.15), the author assumed a position that is too ambitious for the type of work he undertook. He ought to have only located an existing gap/research problem to address. Little wonder his work has many frameworks without the reader being able to actually pinpoint a "unifying framework" on which the work rests as claimed in his preface and introduction (pp. xiv, 3). He equally argued that "connections between elections and conflict have not been studied systematically, using generally acceptable framework of analysis" that interweaves

"the insights of the researcher with the requirements of practitioner" (p.3). Though there may never be a generally acceptable framework, his assertion reveals a deficiency in the literature review. Works like Georgetown University's Electoral Violence Prediction and Prevention (2015) and USAID's Best Practices in Electoral Security (2013) systematically showed the link between elections and conflicts.

The author's writing styles and approaches to address issues sometimes appear verbose and non-concise. As an instance, the expression "In a reporter's diary after the event (later published in the Democracy Monitor Newsletter), I passionately..." (para. 1, p.xii) could as well have read as "After the event, in the Democracy Monitor Newsletter which is a reporter's diary, I passionately..." On p.2, he said, "For a country to be a democracy..." The question of how a country can be a democracy arises. A country is rather democratic than "be a democracy."

Besides these, Omilusi argued for "a more civil approach" being "factored into" (p.15) the activities of security operatives so as not to promote undue advantage and insecurity for everyone involved in electoral procedures. This view takes for granted that many members of the military and para-military organisations in Nigeria do not really accommodate civility as professed. These groups are usually resocialised to maltreat civilians and, as such, see themselves as different from the people they ought to really defend. He equally argued that the military's "retreat" into the barracks "in May 1999 signalled an expansion of criminality within urban areas, along highways, and into borderlands" (p.31). Unfortunately, this statement equally takes for granted that the security situation in the country was actually amplified by military incursion into Nigeria's politics, especially with the events of the civil war and prolonged military rule aggravating the proliferation of small arms. In more recent times, with their corrupt activities while countering insurgency, during procurement of military equipments and at road blocks where they take bribes from innocent drivers and helpless people, the crimes influenced by their activities heighten.

The author expected the military to submit to "a democratic civilian regime" (p.44) as part of the security collaboration with other law enforcement agents and respect for the rule of law. He said "This principle is not negotiable." How he expects this to be possible is in doubt given that Nigeria's problem is not just about theorising but acting out governmental policy instrument to ensure all-round national significance. Expecting the army to submit to democratic regimes without questioning is ideal but African soldiers lack that kind of spirit. Allegations abound of mutinous acts of high ranking officers who, despite professing allegiance to the government of the day, aid insurgents to kill soldiers of the Nigerian army.

Omilusi also recommended the military's involvement

in election (p.42), which portends a dangerous trend for any democracy. No serious democracy involves the military in its electoral processes. For instance, elections in the world's advanced democratic nations are not monitored or controlled by the military but civilians. Glaringly, the Nigerian situation is an abuse. The military's involvement, a palliative the author argued for, holds destructive tendencies for any democracy. The military's duty ought to be limited to defending Nigeria against territorial aggression while the para-military forces constituting the minions of the law should be engaged,

as is the practice, in peace keeping during conducts of elections. Apart from eradicating all instincts of military rule, Nigeria ought to completely demilitarise, even in election matters.

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## REFERENCE

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Omilusi, M. (2017). *Your vote or your life?: Tracking the tangible and intangible dangers in Nigeria's electoral politics* (pp. xxii+340). Ibadan, Nigeria: Striling-Horden Publishers Ltd.