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**ELECTORAL SYSTEM AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA: THE ISLAMIC  
VIEWPOINT ON MULTI-PARTY SYSTEM AND THE PANACEA**

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***Abstract***

*Political violence has become a phenomenon in Nigeria as a heterogeneous country with various religions and ethnicities. Although, the use of violence in elections is not peculiar to recent and emerging democracies in the developing countries, but it is worse there due to the high rate of poverty, unemployment, and ignorance. Violence has been taken as a ride for destabilizing peace and creating conflicts mostly by potential losers at various stages of election. Act of violence includes threats, assault, murder, destruction of property, and physical or psychological harm. Exploitation of the ballot voting system is one of the major rides used by politicians in wrecking the election which results to incessant violence as well as ineffective government. Therefore, this paper examines current Nigeria's electoral system from the Islamic viewpoint and opines that it is no longer feasible. There is need of correctng the weaknesses inundated the system. Data for this research was collected through secondary methods. Descriptive qualitative approach was employed for the analysis of data. Conclusively, the paper recommends the adoption of Khulafa'ul Rashideen electoral system as a substitute that would highly reduce eruption of violence during electoral processes.*

***Keywords:*** *Electoral System, Multi-Party system, Violence, Nigeria, Islamic viewpoint*

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## Introduction

Nigeria still maintains and practises a Multi-party system since its independence in 1960, and yet every final result poses doubt in mind for not being free and fair election. Similarly, election in Nigeria is always accompanied by rigging, overturning of result, imposition of incapacitated candidates which eventually has an effect on the resultant violence, destruction, bloodshed, and even coup at the end.

Multi-party system is one of the electoral systems that depend mainly on majority decisions. In Nigeria, most of the voters are being exploited and used by politicians as vehicle for seizing power. In nutshell, the system has become a hindrance to political development and nation-building at large. For long the nation has been yearning for stable electricity, standard hospitals, qualitative education, and other basic social amenities. However, despite all the efforts made, none of the above is accomplished to date.

This current situation has a link with the electoral system adopted, hence, there is a need for reviewing and reforming the Nigerian electoral system for greater productivity and development. This could be the only way to reduce the inter-group conflicts at all levels during elections.

## Electoral system in Nigeria

Any kind of society adheres to a particular electoral system in transferring power from one government to another. Electoral system forms the set of methods through which citizens' votes are translated into representatives' seats (Lijphart, 1994). The key elements involved in an electoral system are: the electoral formula (plurality/majority, proportional, mixed, or other); the ballot structure (i.e. whether the voter votes for a candidate or a party and whether the voter makes a single choice or expresses a series of preferences); and the district magnitude (the number of representatives to the legislature that a particular district elects) (Menocal, 2011).

Generally, electoral system covers three (3) important periods which include preelectoral period, electoral period, and post-electoral period. Electoral periods are widely referred to as the time in which party candidate selection, campaigning, mobilization, voting, and the subsequent announcement of the results occurs (Timothy, 2017). Similarly, the electoral system remains the key to continuity of any existing democracy as it provides the chance for those who dream to secure any government office, as it is the way for assessing the

effectiveness of government, either to be allowed in their office or to be removed from there.

Just as the electoral systems may help to ease or exacerbate conflicts between parties, government, and people, the system could also be responsible for jeopardizing the future of a nation entirely that may result in a civil war.

In fact, as early as after independence, Nigeria as a democratic country had been using the multi-party system to vote for all its government offices. The multi-party system as a system allows multiple political parties across the political spectrum to run for national election, and all have the capacity to gain control of government offices, separately or in [coalition](#) (Wikipedia, n.d.). According to (Remi, 1999), political parties are a means of organizing the people so that they can select from themselves an elite group which will control the process of public decision-making on their behalf.

In essence, political parties are instrumental and play a central role in emerging democracies through identifying, politicizing and representing social divisions consisting of ethnicities, religions, classes, and geographies (Omotola, 2015, p. 128).

Through multi-party system, people can cast their votes in favor of whom they trust could represent them and help to facilitate in meeting their needs.

### **Multi-party System of Election and Occurrence of Violence in Nigeria**

Accordingly, political parties are built upon principles and core values for democratic stability. (Aleyomi, 2014) stated that:

The role of political parties or party system in modern democracies cannot be underrated. Political parties provide the connection between politics and society. In this sense they perform four crucial functions.

First, political parties develop policies and programmes. This is the content side of their responsibility. It ensures that there are different choices in the political marketplace – not only in terms of candidates but also in terms of ideas. Once in government, a party can start implementing these ideas. Second, parties pick up demands from society and bundle them into packages. Demands are numerous and sometimes conflicting. Parties are able to discuss and evaluate these issues and shape human needs into policy alternatives. In so doing they are an important part of the political process. Third, parties are the main vehicles for recruiting and selecting people for government and

legislative offices. Fourth, parties either oversee or control government depending on whether they are in government or opposition.

Therefore, proper application of these established principles by political parties can serve as a trigger mechanism for development and stability of democracy.

However, Nigeria's electoral system is marked by violence, conflicts, and bloodshed especially during election period, of which many factors embedded in the system played a vital role in corrupting the system. This could be in the form of involving gangs primarily comprising of unemployed youth to rig the election which has become a phenomenon in most Nigerian elections. These gangs are usually sponsored or remunerated and even armed sometimes by the politicians.

Mohammed (2019) asserted that elections were held in Nigeria at different intervals since 1951. From that time to date the country has conducted fourteen different general elections, each of which was bedevilled by contestations and allegations of fraud and electoral violence. (p.126)

Moreover, election violence generally involves political parties along with their supporters, journalists, agents of government, election administrators as well as general population, and this may involve threats, assault, murder, destruction of property, and physical or psychological harm (International Foundation for Election Systems, 2011; Fischer, 2002). The violence could occur at different stages in the election process starting from pre-election period (registration) to post election period (after results). Mostly, the violence that erupts on election day ranges from burning of election offices and materials such as ballot boxes and papers, intimidation of voters, snatching of ballot boxes, rigging, and diversion of election materials (Aniekwe & Kushie, 2011, pp. 4-5).

A critical assessment on the performance of Nigerian parties since 1999 revealed that they actually raise more questions than answers to the problems of the country especially in the challenge of maintaining political stability (Omotola, 2015, p. 138).

Consequently, the outcome of all these conflicts results to frequent breakdowns of political order leading to instability in the country. In the process, several lives have been lost and properties worth millions of naira have also been damaged. By extension, governmental attention and use of scarce resources have been diverted away from developmental goals to

salvaging the crises which has resulted in a quagmire whereby party politics has become more of a liability than an asset to the common man and the society at large (Omotola, 2015, p. 141)

Additionally, it is quite observable that the multi-party system serves as a tool for democratic stability and peaceful coexistence in a nation. However, despite its long adoption and practice in Nigeria, approaches used by political parties have led to crisis, conflicts, bloodshed, coup, corruption, and overturning of electoral results which have cramped the nation-building.

It is noteworthy that the problems that render multi-party system incapable of moving the nation forward and hinder the political development in the country include the following:

- 1- **Vote Buying:** During the pre-election period, parties use either money or materials to buy votes in order to win a large number of votes to themselves. This vote buying can take many forms; either in the form of bribe, intimidation or deception.

It is not surprising therefore that when one party seizes power it tends to govern on the basis of whims (Remi, 1999).

- 2- **Consideration of majority:** In a multi-party system, the winner is the candidate with the plurality or relative majority of all valid votes, and the parties may employ illegal ways to grant themselves victory.

- 3- **Imposition of anointed candidates:** Multi-party system often gives opportunity to even less competent individuals to be their candidates either because of their status or through corrupt means.

- 4- **Ethnic Politics:** Ethnic loyalty has become an issue on the side of multi-party system in Nigeria. Every ethnic group tends to associate itself to its own political party or affiliations which makes the Nigerian political system in the fourth republic to be ethnic based (Gbolahan & Duruji, 2017).

- 5- **Lack of Party Ideology:** this consists of the defined programmes and activities as part of the political ideology that a political party is committed to implementing when voted into office (Gbolahan & Duruji, 2017, p. 447).

- 6- **Godfatherism** is one major cause of electoral violence, corruption and political instability that affects the political development in the fourth republic (Gbolahan & Duruji, 2017, p. 447). It has been a great impediment to democratic consolidation that some

elites have the means to control and decide on the fate of Nigerian election. It operates in the manner that whoever aspires to contest must seek their endorsement as they form the backbone of the success to who wins the election.

7- Party Defections: One factor that has also retarded the progress of the democracy of the fourth republic is the defection of party members from own political party to rival political parties due to turnout of events not favourable to them or some needs not met (Gbolahan & Duruji, 2017, p. 448).

8- Over Ambitious Politicians: some politicians engage in antiparty behaviors so as to win political power. These over-ambitious politicians are so desperate that they risk snatching ballot boxes, bribing polling unit officials, and deploying political thugs if the need arises (Gbolahan & Duruji, 2017, p. 448).

In summary, the political parties in Nigerian political system are non-ideological in nature, whereby the parties do not have well-defined principles guiding their conducts. They usually consist of just a mere gathering of politicians yearning to loot, hence, their main aim is only in charting the course to win political power at all cost. And if the eventually succeed, their next move sadly is to find ways to loot the coffers of the government (Gbolahan & Duruji, 2017, p. 446). Hence, this lack of party ideology triggers internal conflicts among politicians within the party in this fourth republic, because most of the political elites and the other politicians do not share the same values and interests which creates imbalance within the party. This has been a major defect in the democratic and electoral development in the fourth republic, because if the party cannot internally coordinate itself how would they bring credible candidates that will be able to run the affairs of the state (Gbolahan & Duruji, 2017, p. 447).

In the same vein, irregular practices have equally become rampant owing to the fact that the parties are not sufficiently rooted in society, that allows party financiers to hijack the parties for their personal interests which includes the imposition of “anointed” candidates. On the other hand, Nigerian parties have not been able to maintain stable inter- and intra-party relations, as there have been crises of high magnitude within parties that have threatened their very corporate existence

(Omotola, 2015, p. 139)”

Their parties in the absence of indiscipline are always on the side of their candidate, supporting him and assisting him to perpetrate any form of offense as long as it will render them an opportunity to win.

### **Multi-party System and the Islamic Viewpoint**

Nigeria has for long been using multi-party system, though the system has been maimed by some factors preventing it from functioning perfectly. As mentioned earlier factors such as vote buying, ethnic politics, lack of party Ideology, godfatherism, party defections because of self-interest, over-ambitious politicians are all associated with this system. Hence, many were killed, properties were destroyed, and houses were abandoned at the expense of democracy.

On the other hand, Islam is holistic in approach, comprehensive in nature, its legislation is unique and its judgment is perfect. However, this discourse will not focus on the Islamic ruling on democracy, because this has been well deliberated by Islamic scholars. Nevertheless, the focus of this study is to bring to the limelight the Islamic viewpoint on multi-party system.

Verily, Islam condemns any kind of act that may lead to damage, loss of life, or any casualty. There are five (5) ultimate necessities that every individual needs to enjoy as a human being which must be protected and preserved. Islam urges its adherents to protect such necessities so that human being will live in peace. These five necessities include: religion, life, mind, progeny, and property. Importantly, the government must ensure the total protection of these five essential necessities of every individual living under its territory.

Specifically, in terms of protecting lives, the Almighty said: "And do not kill the soul [i.e., person] which Allah has forbidden, except by right. And whoever is killed unjustly – We have given his heir authority, but let him not exceed limits in [the matter of] taking life. Indeed, he has been supported [by the law]." (Qur'an 17: 33)

The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) regarding the protection of property, progeny, and property said in a hadith: "The whole of the Muslim is sacred to his fellow Muslim, his blood, his wealth and his honor." (Ibn Majah, 2007, Vol. 5, Book 36, Hadith 3933, p.167)

In general, the multi-party system consists of the following elements:

### 1. Consideration of majority:

In a multi-party system, the winner is the candidate with majority votes. Though, in Nigeria votes are sold and bought through the multi-party system, in which a candidate who does not have the credibility to represent his/her people can amass a large number of votes through vote-buying. This makes some of the incompetent individuals to secure a political position, majority of whom are inclined to personal interest satisfaction and follow their own desire with lack of careful observation.

It is clear in the Scripture, in which the Qur'an has characterized the people with ignorance, misunderstanding, and misguidance. God has even told his Prophet the following:

*"If you were to obey most of those on earth, they would divert you from God's path..." (Qur'an 6:116).*

*And what reason have you that you should not eat of that on which Allah's name has been mentioned, and He has already made plain to you what He has forbidden to you- excepting what you are compelled to; and most surely many would lead (people) astray by their low desires out of ignorance; surely your Lord- He best knows those who exceed the limits (Qur'an 6:119).*

*And most of them follow not except assumption. Indeed, assumption avails not against the truth at all. Indeed, Allah is knowing of what they do (Qur'an 10:36).*

*And even if We had sent down to them the angels and the dead had spoken to them and We had brought together all things before them, they would not believe unless Allah pleases, but most of them are ignorant (Qur'an 6:111).*

On the other hand, there are instances where the Holy Quran has praised the minority.

*But why were there not among the generations before you those possessing understanding, who should have forbidden the making of mischief in the earth, except a few of those whom We delivered from among them? And those who were unjust went after what they are made to enjoy of plenty, and they were guilty (Qur'an 11:116).*



Therefore, the decision of the public on hot issues as per the assertions from the Qura'nic in several verses can jeopardize their lives in a way that can harm their future and put them to risk. Consideration of majority according to the Quran is condemnable and should not be given preference.

#### **Imposition of undeserved/incompetent person:**

Majority system gives opportunities to underserved people to contest and run for election, whereby with the current politics of godfatherism and votes' buying, they may be able to win the election. This is among the main issues that set Nigeria's politics backward. By giving emphasis on human welfare, Islam perceives leadership as a psychological contract between a leader and his followers by which he tries his best to guide, protect, and treat them fairly and with justice. Hence, the focus of leadership in Islam is on doing good (Beekun & Badawi, 1998).

In essence, Islam has made leadership to be responsibility that is guided by accountability. In Islam, not everyone is qualified to lead because it is a trust. Islam has laid down conditions and qualities that a person must fulfill before being appointed to a responsible position. Equally, a leader must acquire certain qualities, such as knowledge, *hikmah*, *taqwa*, justice, courage, decisiveness, and *sabr*. Islam emphasises on the great importance of personal qualities or character of a person to be carefully examined especially at the time of appointment into a key position. For a leader, it is required that he must possess an excellent character and moral virtues in order that he may influence his followers. (Monjur, 2010)

#### **Impact of Multi-party System on Society and the Islamic Viewpoint**

Despite that multi-party system had been in use for long in Nigeria, yet there was no development in the politics besides backwardness, instability, and conflicts that surrounded the society at large. The multi-party system in Nigeria has always been accompanied by atrocities which has had adverse effects on the nation's development, such as:

##### **1. Disruption of government efficacy**

A political party under the system of multiparty is based upon certain specific objectives set to guide its policies. However, that does not guarantee the absence of its desirous ambitions and interest that is to be fulfilled through the elect-candidate. In this regard, not duly fulfilling the wishes of the party would be at the expense of continuity ticket for the candidate.

On the other hand, the absolute authority from Islamic viewpoint rest on the shoulders of the leader, but that does grant him an unlimited power. He could be impeached by the Majlis of *Ahl Hil Wal Aqd* if he transgresses the limits ordained by Allah. He is entrusted with public affairs and under no circumstances would he be allowed to prefer plutocracy's interest over the publics' interest. Islam considers him as Allah's vicegerent in charge of People's property which he has been entrusted by God and is accountable to God for the trust.

Allah says: Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due and when you judge between people to judge with justice. Excellent is that which Allah instructs you. Indeed, Allah is ever Hearing and Seeing. (Qur'an 3:58)

The Prophet said: A ruler who has been entrusted with the affairs of the Muslims but he makes no endeavors (for the material and moral uplift) and does not sincerely mean (their welfare) would not enter Paradise along with them. (Muslim, 2007. Vol. 1, ch. 63, Hadith 365, p. 233). Therefore, authority is considered as trust and divine responsibility in Islam, and whoever is appointed to a public office and failed to fulfill its obligation it would be a shame and regret upon him in the day of judgment.

In a hadith, Prophet (PBUH) said: authority is a trust. and on the Day of judgment, it is a cause of humiliation and repentance except for one who fulfills its obligations and (properly) discharges the duties attendant thereon. (Muslim, 2007. Vol. 5, ch. 4, Hadith 4719, p. 512)

### **Defection from one party to another**

Multi-party system makes insincere, ambitious, and untruthful candidates to repudiate their allegiance to their party, and subsequently join and contest under another party.

This attitude has yielded apathy among voters during elections since the political administration is restricted and circulated within a particular class. Whereas, leadership in Islam is not restricted to any class or stratum an individual belongs to, however, it is guided by the character of the person. Therefore, any person found untrustworthy will be labeled as (*fasiq*) disobedient, so his testimony will no longer be regarded neither be considered in such public affairs.

The Almighty said: And those who accuse chaste women and then do not produce four witnesses – lash them with eighty lashes and do not accept from them testimony ever after. And those are the defiantly disobedient (Qur'an 24:4)

Islam has illustrated the qualities and characteristics of a leader in its existing literature. The Virtue of a good leader has been emphasized in multiple Islamic texts. The Prophet (PBUH) said: "Indeed, the most beloved of people to Allah on the Day of Judgement, and the nearest to Him in the status is the just Imam. And the most hated of people to Allah and the furthest from Him in status is the oppressive Imam.

(At-Tirmidhi, 2007, Vol. 3, Book 13, Hadith 1329, p. 125).

### **Rigging election results**

Sometimes, the contesting candidates deploy and sponsor illiterate unemployed youth to cause mayhem during election period purposely to create chaos so as to get chance to rig the election results. This clash between rivals and supporters of a candidate could lead to violence that ends with fatal damage to the society.

Importantly, during the Khulafa' rashideen era, the right of appointing and deposing a ruler is the responsibility of Ahl Hil Wal Aqd on behalf of the Ummah entirely. This team of Ahl Hil Wal Aqd comprised of highly legal scholars whose task is to choose the most qualified person as a leader. Hence, this method of choosing Imam will reduce the high tendency of violence during election as adopted in the Nigerian multiparty system as well as keeping incompetent individuals from manning public affairs. More so, Islam as the religion of peace condemns and forbids any act that may lead to instability and violence. Islam enjoins its adherents to live in peace and not to be an agent of destruction through whom someone could be harmed, hurt, or injured.

It is narrated on the authority of Jabir that he heard the (Holy Prophet) say: A Muslim is he from whose hand and tongue the Muslims are safe. (Muslim, 2007.

Vol. 1, ch. 14, Hadith 162, p. 137)

### **Throwing baseless criticism towards opposition parties**

Often, opposition parties lay baseless criticisms against the ruling party due to animosity and viciousness. Such behavior retards the progress of the nation

and deviates attention of the politicians from valuable issues. Nevertheless, Islam does not deter anyone from exercising freedom of speech and criticism, but this has to be carried out within the stipulated limit, because a leader has rights upon his followers and vice-versa. Vividly, Qur'an condemns the acts of spreading lies and wrong information for the purpose of creating confusion and division among the Ummah. Allah says:

Indeed, those who like that immorality should be spread [or publicized] among those who have believed will have a painful punishment in this world and the Hereafter.

And Allah knows and you do not know. (Qur'an 24:19)

### **Limiting access to better deserving personalities**

It is often a practice that qualified personalities might be denied access to contest under multi-party system as a result of self-interest and political bias. This paves way to incompetent people to move ahead and rule. Though, in Islam, appointments to leadership positions is subject to ability, capacity, and character.

Abu Dharr once said to the Prophet (PBUH): Messenger of Allah, will you not appoint me to a public office? He stroked my shoulder with his hand and said: Abu Dharr, thou art weak and authority is a trust. and on the Day of judgment, it is a cause of humiliation and repentance except for one who fulfills its obligations and (properly) discharges the duties attendant thereon. (Muslim, 2007. Vol. 5, ch. 4, Hadith 4719, p. 512)

The Quran has preached that a leader should emulate moral values and good conduct as shown by the Prophet (PBUH). These qualities are very essential for a leader the role-model for the society. Equally, a leader is required to have exceptional mental ability, and should be a person with extensive and in-depth knowledge of administrative matters, open-mindedness, and foresight (Ezad, et al., 2012). Several verses strictly urge Muslims to be unbiased and just when giving testimony. Allah says:

"O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm in justice, witnesses for Allah, even if it be against yourselves or parents and relatives.. ." (Qur'an 3:135)

A well-known tradition of the Prophet (PBUH) is he has warned against using subjective criteria in appointments of leaders. Appointments to leadership positions should be mainly based on qualifications and the ability to do the job. Muslims are encouraged not to use nepotism and favoritism as basis for appointment process (Haddara & Enanny, 2009).

### Model of Kulafar Rashidin's Electoral System

Islam allows people to exercise their freewill and adopt any method in choosing the right leader as long as it is in conformity with Maqasid Shari'a. hence, the model of electoral system designed by the companions of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) remains worthy of emulation throughout centuries. It is significant to note the allegiance pledged to Abubakar consensually by majority of Sahabahs that are wellgrounded in diverse fields of scholarship. More so, the second caliph, Umar bn

Khattab was also chosen under the *Shurah* (consultation) council that comprised of *Ahl Hil Wal Aqd*. Therefore, his appointment is ideally democratic after fair consultation with the Shura council. (Tamir Abu As Su'ood & Noha, 2001, p. 134).

Whereas, Umar (R.A) in his last days also after being stabbed by Abu Luoluo Al Majoosy, delegated the responsibility of choosing a successor to six people from Quraish (Tamir Abu As Su'ood & Noha, 2001, p. 134). After he passed away, this group that was formed held a meeting and pledged allegiance to Uthman (R.A) as their Caliph after consultation. Consequently, the Muslim Ummah expressed their consent upon the unanimity of *Ahl Hil Wal Aqd*. Subsequently, the appointment of Ali as a caliph was also based on qualification and unanimity reached among the people of Makkah and Madinah.

It is worthy to note that the appointment of Uthman (R.A) Caliph passed through certain stages, which are: a- Qualification b- Nomination c- Consultation

d- Recommendation e- Appointment

Hence, the process of selecting a caliph during the period of rightly guided caliphs is marked by impartiality and objectivity. All of the four beloved Caliphs were chosen after consultation of the most knowledgeable figures of the community, followed by the general consent of the populace. This in return provided a peaceful atmosphere with zero violence during the pre and post-election period.

### Conclusion

From the foregoing analysis, the paper concludes by pointing out that the incessant violence occurring during election period in Nigeria is linked to the current electoral system adopted which often leads to stagnation and retrogression. The nation-building is dependent on the strong pillars of its electoral system. Politicians have made the populace the vehicle used to seize power, which upon assumption, they tend to govern on the basis of their whims and caprices. Therefore, it is for utmost importance that the multi-party system should be reviewed, and a substitute should be introduced. The independent national electoral commission has to review the electoral

policies in a way that will guarantee and secure lives and properties from destruction. Alternatively, an exemplary approach and method could be traced in the administration of Khulafa Rashidin. In essence, electoral systems should be carefully designed to fit the Nigerian society in a manner that will tackle any challenge either from the parties or community.

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