THE ROLE OF ELECTORAL PROPHECY, COURT JUDGEMENTS AND NATIONAL SECURITY IN NIGERIA: THE IMO STATE EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

Predictions of who wins an election have become a recurring phenomenon in Nigeria since this present democratic era. The 2019 elections in Nigeria saw prominent religious leaders or spiritualists reel out prophecies of eventual winners or losers in a practice that is fast becoming entrenched. Using the case of Imo State, this paper argues that electoral related prophecies pose a security threat, which if not dealt with may ignite crisis and endanger the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. Methodologically, the documentary method is used to source for data and desk review serves as the tool of analysis. Also, the paper is situated within the theoretical framework of spiritual dimension of human and national security, which takes into cognizance the peculiarity of Nigeria's security threats rooted in spiritual related utterances among others. Hence, the paper recommends that religious leaders should apply caution so as to determine the kind of prophecy to make public in order to avoid precipitating crisis.

Keywords: Prophecies, Elections, Democratic Consolidation, National Security, Polls.

Introduction

Since the transition to democracy in Nigeria, the electioneering period has arguably been embodied with prophetic forecasts and declarations that bother largely on electoral outcomes. It is now a reoccurring phenomenon that at the verge of any election, the Nigerian public space is inundated with an avalanche of pronouncements from religious leaders on who will win or lose elections. No doubt, this incident is as a result of the vital role religion plays in the country as well as the spiritualization of electoral process (Ayantayo, 2009; Onapajo, 2016). It is obvious that in Nigeria, religious leaders intend to gain more respect than political leaders due to their large followership and influence. It is this recognition that is used as a bait to attract the attention of candidates seeking elected offices (Obadare, 2006).

As a result, some religious leaders particularly of Christian descent have frequently reeled out prophecies as regards potential electoral outcomes. In Nigeria, the use of prophecy in the

political arena is traced to the military era, where certain religious leaders saw it as redemptive mode of political engagement amid the dilapidating political and socio-economic condition during military rule (Adeboye, 2007; Ikem, et al, 2020). With the transition to democracy in 1999, divine prophecy has become part and parcel of the electoral process. Despite the reoccurrence of this phenomenon, it has not received adequate intellectual interrogation in Nigeria, notwithstanding its implications to among others trigger security threats amid fiercely contested elections (Ikem, et al 2020). Therefore, using the case of Imo State, this paper highlights how electoral related prophecies may pose security threats, which if not dealt with ,may endanger the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria.

This paper is divided into the introduction that discusses electoral prophecy and election. This is followed by the spiritual dimension of human and national security as an analytical framework. The next section deals with electoral prophecies in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, which is followed by the section on popular or spiritual mandate. The 2019 Imo State governorship election and its attendant security impact is discussed next. Finally, is the conclusion and recommendations.

Electoral Prophecy and Election

Despite growing scholarship on Nigeria's electoral studies, the manifestations of the spiritual dimension embedded in the electoral process have largely been marginalized and undermined. This is evident because several studies have looked at various aspects of the electoral process without giving due attention to the phenomenon of predictions or prophecies from seers. This may have accounted for the lesser attention given to election prophecies by scholars despite the fact that the media is usually enthused with them.

The phenomenon of electoral prophecy is used to describe the unscientific manner of predicting or explaining electoral outcome mostly attributed or rooted in divine, transcendental, sacred or mysterious exposition (Ikem, et al, 2020). This practice entails a situation where an individual lays claim to have been given insight to the eventual electoral outcome by some revelation. Therefore, the attempt to contextualize electoral prophecy immediately take into recognition the prominence of the divine, mysterious and the supernatural without due attention given to the

dictates of empirical science. For Nwolise (2015), there are three main sources of supernatural communication, and this include: prophecy, occult prediction and false prediction. Such means of electoral predictions negates scientific methodology and objectivity of data collection and analysis typical with pollsters in forecasting elections.

This may not be surprising because politics and particularly elections generally bring to mind the idea of theocracy (Ayantayo, 2009). In essence, any government is instituted by God, a kind of polity in which God is regarded as the sole sovereign and the laws of the realm are seen as divine commands. In practice, “theocracy manifests in the belief that God is the political King, ruler or leader who rules his people indirectly through a set of people (Ayantayo, 2009: 95). This explains why countries in the past were subjected to religious institution in their acts of governance. While most advanced countries have severed the church-state relations, in Nigeria, religious beliefs still invoke in governance issues.

Particularly, in the election matters, Ayantayo (2009) observed that there has been a noticeable spiritualization of the electoral process which entails the act of taking Nigeria’s electoral matters into the supernatural realm. This phenomenon is not a peculiar feature in Nigeria, as other studies have shown the preeminence of divine declarations in every round of electoral cycle in other African countries (Acheampong, 2018; Yong, 2014). These studies commonly demonstrate that there seems to be increasing reliance on spiritual rather than physical strategies and plans in electoral campaigns to woo voters to a particular party or candidate. As a matter of fact, politicians are increasingly relying on prayers, prophecies and other supernatural means to win election (Ayantayo, 2009).

In fact, Ayantayo (2009, p.101), has forcefully argued that in Nigeria’s present democratic dispensation, notwithstanding the office being sought for, politicians mainly rely either on the “power of prayer or magic to win elections”, illustrating further how to a large extent, this notion of spiritual electoral process has settled in the psyche of the electorate. As a result, making them believe that regardless of the degree of sophistication that characterize an election, and/or the level of persuasion a political party or its candidate is able to gather, it will translate to no value except the outcome has been settled in his favour in the spiritual realm. It is in this

regard that the prophetic declarations usually released during election period are presumed to be settled in the spiritual realm in favour or against a particular candidate or political party.

Seeing that God is in-charge of the general affairs in the polity, it is considered that it is only those whom He chooses that are divinely approved to rule. It is in this regard that prophets who are seen as his messengers, presumably tell the public the mind of God as regards the candidate or political party that has been chosen to rule. Amazingly, in political parlance in Nigeria, it is usual to hear clichés such as “God sent”, “Anointed candidate” or “Divine mandate” as euphemisms for political candidates presumably running under the toga of prophetic endorsement.

Spiritual Dimension of Human and National Security: Theoretical Framework

The concept of security is one of the most contested in the field of international relations. This is primarily because its meaning, interpretation and range are considered too vast and diversified. Nevertheless, scholars view security as freedom from fear, danger, turmoil, hostility, war, violence and any form of threat that causes uneasiness for humans, groups or nations (Nwolise, 2012).

The concept of national security had predominantly been associated with state-centric focus with high military capability to guarantee territorial integrity, preservation of sovereignty and survival of the state. This is the perspective that had dominated the works of realist such as Morgenthau (1960), Watt (1991) and Nielsen (2006). During the cold war era, state security was the logic that defined and shaped international relations. But the end of the cold war as well as the rise of non-militaristic threats shifted the focus of policy makers and scholars to recognize and appreciate these threats. As a result, security expanded horizontally to include non-military factors such as: economic, political, environmental, societal security; while vertically, security went beyond the state to include and emphasise individuals, social groups and humanity at large (Nwolise, 2012). It was in this sense of enlarged conceptualisation of security that came to be called human security.

Nwolise (2012), expanded the concept of security and added other dimensions of security. These new dimensions include: physical security, psychological security, technological security, treasury security, Image security, territorial security, legal security, people's power security, global security and spiritual. In particular, he defines spiritual security as the safety of the human spirit and body from spiritual threats and attacks (Nwolise, 2012, pp.15-17). This is the guarantee of safety, peace, development, welfare and happiness of the human spirit.

He contends further that the failure of taking into context the spiritual threats to security leaves us with half-researched phenomenon or at best, incoherent and incomplete explanation of a widely used concept. He contends that:

It is important to raise awareness and place spiritual security on the front burner of intellectual discourse and research where it can service humanity, by saving lives and catalyzing progress. The point needs to be made clearly and loudly that without understanding the spiritual dimension of security, the total story of human and national security cannot be known and told. (Nwolise, 2012:10).

It was in this regard that he called for the development of the science of the spirit as a balance to the science of matter. Even though he recognizes how hard it might be in trying to create a niche for the overdose scientific and Eurocentric template of conceptualising security, he, nevertheless, urges its pursue. This is because as he said “nothing happens in the physical realm without first happening in the spiritual” (Nwolise, 2012: 17). According to him, both the scientific and intellectual worlds have failed and proved incapable of accounting for the loses and devastations suffered by humanity due to its spiritual roots, which poses threats to both human and national security.

Some of these observable spiritual threats to human and national security include the wrath of God, wrath of local deities, charms, witchcraft, curses, spells, oath-breaking, death-based spells and oaths, bewitched objects, spiritual covenants, secret societies and cult groups, static and roving spirits, hypnotism and religious fanaticism and sexual indiscipline (Nwolise, 2012: 18-26). More so, the wrath of God may come in the form of prophecy especially where a people have offended Him. There are several biblical and contemporary examples where such

pronouncements have caused devastating damage to lives and socio-political existence. On the other hand, occult prediction and false prediction as alternative forms of supernatural communication are mostly known to cause destruction, instill fear or mislead its audience.

Nwolise (2015) observed that with regard to electoral matters, politicians in Africa have been noted to go in search of diabolical powers in order to win elections, in the extreme case, get involved in ritual murder. This seems to affirm the assertion of Ayantayo (2009) about the spiritualization of Nigeria's electoral process, by giving some degree of recognition to spiritually-related factors in an effort to win election.

It is in this light that it must be understood that elections are mainly seen as a fight between evil and good; light against darkness (Acheampong, 2018). More so, that God must expressively choose the most qualified among contending candidates, since it is believed that when the righteous rule, the people rejoice. According to Acheampong (2018), Pentecostal pastors and prophets came to assume the role of gate keepers of the state, claiming to be anointed to fight against the powers of darkness, and to negotiate and renegotiate with God the destinies of the nation and individuals. As a result, only political candidates divinely approved and revealed, and prophetically declared, are deemed fit to be elected.

While prophetic declarations may have become part and parcel of Nigeria's electoral process, its claim to supernatural exposition may pose threat to the electoral process and security of lives and property in the sense that it may incite supporters of a candidate to violently affirm or oppose the declared prophecies vis-à-vis election result. For instance, certain Niger Delta militants had threatened in 2015 that if Goodluck Jonathan was not reelected as president of Nigeria, there would be war. They even vowed to destroy the country's economy by disrupting oil supplies. These threats came after several prophecies declared that Goodluck Jonathan was billed to win the presidential election (Ikem, et al, 2020). Perhaps, it was the peace agreement signed by the presidential candidates committing them and their supporters to peaceful polls and acceptance of election result that averted crisis after INEC announced the winner of the 2015 presidential election.

Electoral Prophecies in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

Prophetic declarations are becoming a tradition in Nigeria's electoral process since the beginning of present democratic dispensation. It has been argued that this phenomenon denotes the means Pentecostal pastors tend to engage in the political process (Ayantayo, 2009; Obadare, 2006; Burgess, 2015). Some authors point to the rising involvement of other religious groups beyond Christian pastors in election predictions.

For instance, at every round of elections, the Witches and Wizards Association of Nigeria (hereinafter WITZAN) releases names of likely winners or losers in national or state elections. In 2016 for example, WITZAN predicted that the candidate of the All Progressives Congress (APC) would be the winner of the governorship election in Ondo State. While in the recently concluded presidential election, the WITZAN predicted that the candidate of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), Atiku Abubakar was anointed to win the election. The spokesman of the association stated that "we have prayed. We have done all that needed to be done. In our meetings at Obudu Mountain and Zuma Rock in Abuja, the spirits of the forefathers of this country came together to anoint Atiku as the next President of Nigeria (Pulse, 2019).

While the predictions of such fringe association such as WITZAN is hardly commented on or attract sufficient attention in the media or among Nigerians, nonetheless, it has been able to utilize the availability of mass media to disseminate its predictions. On the other hand, the most prominent and generally commented on are those of Christian religious leaders. This might not be surprising as they are noted to command wide following and respect among their followers (Nwolise, 2015).

In the meantime, some scholars began to profusely write on the increasing influence of religious activism in Nigeria Public space (Obadare, 2007; Edewor, 2008, Yong, 2014; Burgess, 2015; Ehianu, 2016). Generally, they talked about the continued influence of religion in the political trajectory of Nigeria, but, more importantly, Edewor (2008) and Burgess (2015), pointed to the fact of the expressive mode of prophetic declarations by Pentecostal pastors in a bid to reinforce reassurance of a better tomorrow amid degenerating socio-economic and political condition in

the military era. In particular, Edewor (2008) and Ayantayo (2009), observed that the spiritualization of religious activism accounted for the instrumentalization of prayers and prophecy as the mode of mass conscientization and agenda-setting. Specifically, both prayers and prophecy became increasingly important in electoral matters and process in Nigeria.

For instance, at the turn from military to civilian democratic rule in Nigeria, prophecy about the then transition programme was made by Pastor Tunde Bakare, declaring thus the voice of the Spirit:

In a vision, I eavesdropped on the conversation going on in the Heaven. I saw Jesus on the throne called the seat of the Governor and the subject they were discussing was Nigeria. This was what came out of the lips of the Lord: “Rejoice not oh land, for your joy will be temporary. For I am bringing the nation- Nigeria, the rulers, the priests and the prophets there to my threshing floor...Obasanjo is not your messiah. He is King Agag and the prophetic axe will fall upon his head before May 29. (The Whistler, 2017: 5).

From the above prophetic declaration, it was expected that there was a divine judgment against the then newly elected President, Olusegun Obasanjo waiting to be executed. The implied meaning was that Obasanjo would be killed before he would ascend the office of the President of the Federal Republic as duly elected democratic leader. No doubt, the implication of such prophetic pronouncement was evident as Nigerians had anticipated quick exit from military dictatorship to democracy. It was reported that there was widespread fear and panic as it was considered to be an issue of national security concern (Ikem, et al, 2020). It further intensified the already fragile atmosphere of a possible coup by certain deranged military officers or death by any other means. It is important to note that this particular prophecy was taken seriously because Pastor Tunde Bakare had seemingly established himself as a credible prophetic voice in Nigeria’s political landscape due to confirmations accompanying his declarations (The Whistler, 2017), as the case of Abacha death mentioned earlier illustrated. However, since 1999, the public space has been inundated with barrage of electoral prophecies at every round of elections. It seemingly reached its crescendo when in 2015 presidential election; there were several prophecies in a discordant tune declaring all manner of election outcome and possible eventuality. Nwolise (2015: 3-4) explains this thus:

The voices of prophets have been so loud over the 2015 general elections and the survival of Nigeria that prophecy has pierced the politics- religion divided into the political domain. The voices of prophets have attracted the attention of millions of people in Nigeria and abroad with questions being raised...Some prophets have warned repeatedly against violence before, during and after the 2015 elections. Some prophets are saying that one presidential candidate or the other will win, while some are saying that none of the two will be on the seat. Some prophets have pleaded that Nigerians should accept the outcome of the Presidential elections, no matter who wins whether incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan of the People's Democratic Party, or General Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressives' Congress. Some prophets have warned against military coup aimed at forcefully overthrowing the constitution and winner of the presidential election.

The above prophecies proved more precarious during this period due to the tense atmosphere occasioned by the election. For instance, there were rumours in certain quarters that the government of Goodluck Jonathan was trying to use the insecurity situation to elongate his hold onto power. Others said the government was generally not prepared to ensure a smooth transition, rather, that there were plans to foist a transitional government. Consequently, the campaign Director-General of All Progressives Congress (APC) Rotimi Amaechi, threatened that if the 2015 presidential was rigged, the outcome would not be accepted, rather a parallel government would be formed by his party. Further affirming this inciting statement of Rotimi Amaechi, the APC through its Publicity Secretary, Lai Mohammed declared that it represented the party's position. (Premium Times, November 21, 2014). The empirical proof of some of these prophetic declarations prior to the 2015 is presented in **Table 1** below.

Table 1: Prophetic Declarations by Some Religious Leaders prior to 2015 General Elections

Name of Religious Leader	Prophetic Declarations
Apostle Johnson Suleiman	I see President Goodluck Jonathan coming back but trouble...2015 presidential election will be rigged, marred in violence and end up in court case.
Apostle Frederick	Nigerians should watch out for the second term of His Excellency President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan...As long as I'm concerned as a man gifted by God to see the past, the current and the future beyond the curtains of the natural, I know by the inspiration of the Almighty that president Jonathan is the set man for Nigeria...On this account I therefore declare the HE Goodluck Ebele Jonathan will win the coming elections.
Apostle Dr. Ogochukwu T. Amaukwu	If at all there will be election in 2015, I see president Goodluck Jonathan returning as president...I see APC winning seventy percent (70%) of the seats but I see PDP taking the presidency. If at all there will be election, APC will claim to have won the presidential election and will drag PDP to court...but the court will give it to Goodluck Jonathan. There shall be a cry for a re-election.
Pastor Joshua Iginla	No matter how powerful and organized 2015 elections is, it will be faulted. I am not a politician nor belong to any political party, I am just speaking God's mind. The person sitting on the seat might be perfect, but he will retain the seat...President Jonathan will win, but he has to pray about his health and so many political blows.
Primate Theophilus O. Olabayo	To start with God has revealed to me that there may not be elections next year because in 2015, we are going to witness one of the worst political assassinations in Nigeria...if there will be elections next year in Nigeria, the seat of the president is not vacant. God has revealed to me that if at all there is going to be presidential election, it will be inconclusive just like (the June 12).
Pastor DapoAdeniyi	Buhari has a good agenda to eradicate corruption in Nigeria. But it is unfortunate that he will not win the election...He will accuse PDP of rigging the election, go to court but justice will not prevail. What a pity. I see him fainting and uncooperative to ensure the peace of Nigeria after defeat.
Prophet Michael Olubode	I want to let the people of Nigeria know that the Lord will return His Excellency, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan to his presidential seat...The Lord revealed to me that the purpose of making him remain in government is to use him to build Nigeria's economy.
Dr. OkhueIboi	I don't see General Mohammadu Buhari ruling this country.
Guru Maharaji	There is no vacancy for Buhari at Aso Rock. President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan is the verifiable divine choice of the forthcoming presidential election. As the living Perfect Master of creation in whose hands the fate of Nigeria project lies spiritually, I declare from the above.

Source: The NEWS, April 4, 2015; Ikem et al, 2020

From **Table 1**, it will be observed the consistency of prophetic declarations pointing to the eventual win of then President Goodluck Jonathan in the 2015 presidential election. There was no doubt that these prophecies may have put to question the integrity of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) when the results of that election were declared to the contrary and on the other hand, raised suspicion about the results being declared.

Thus, it was not strange to see the then Minister of the Niger Delta, Godwin Orubebe, disrupt the announcement of the presidential election results at the national collation centre in Abuja being beamed live on Television. The Minister who was an agent of his political party- Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) at the national level, had raised concerns about the results coming from Jigawa, Kano and Katsina States which were alleged to have been inflated (Agbajileke, 2015). While the INEC chairman Attahiru Jega did not respond to the said petitions, his action to send a committee to Rivers State to investigate violent and fraudulent activities associated with the presidential election in the state was seen as bias and selective, being one of the stronghold states of former President Goodluck Jonathan.

The Minister accused the INEC chairman of taking sides with the All Progressives Congress (APC) and subsequently declared that the PDP had lost confidence in his ability to render an unbiased election result. Notwithstanding, the result as declared by INEC for the presidential election, showed that General Muhammadu Buhari, candidate of the All Progressive Congress (APC) won with 15, 424,921 votes to beat his immediate rival, former President Goodluck Jonathan of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) who gathered 12,853,162 votes.

As earlier noted by Nwolise (2015), the discordant prophecies being reeled out at every round of election raises some fundamental concerns. These concerns border on the security and integrity of the electoral process. Similarly, these concerns could be extended to the broader impact they may have in undermining democratic consolidation in Nigeria. For instance, the Constitution empowering the President to appoint the national chairman of INEC and the Resident Electoral Commissioners, as well as its dependence on the executive for funding, has created the perception that the commission may be under pressure to do the biddings of the President. Obi (2011: 377) notes that these two factors have made the INEC susceptible to the influence of the

executive arm of government, as the former depends on the latter for appointments and funding. It has also given the president the space to use his discretion to appoint party sympathizers or loyalists as electoral officials.

Moreover, due to its institutional weakness, INEC has been incapacitated in the face of vivid display of hooliganism and outright compromise of the electoral process and materials, to the extent that culprits involved in such acts are not punished. The case of the garrison commander of Ibadan politics, late Chief Adedibu, who had on several occasions seized electoral materials meant for election and kept them in his house, and was neither arrested nor persecuted. Obi (2011) further notes that the electoral institution's poor performance has had deleterious impact on the quality, credibility and legitimacy of post-1999 election. It is on record that there is hardly any election that INEC has conducted that has not been contested in court, and in some cases upturned. Hence, it may be that certain candidates may not accept result as declared by INEC in the face of prophecies affirming their victory at the polls.

In another vein, the 2019 general elections presented another unsavoury moment of various prophetic declarations focused mainly on the two major contenders, President Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressives Congress (APC) and Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party (PDP). Some religious leaders had declared that the APC was going to win; others said it was the PDP. Yet others declared that none of the prominent candidates was going to win the election. As shown in Table 2 are some of the prophecies indicating the likely winner or loser, and manner of another possible political outcome.

Table 2: Some prophecies declared prior to the 2019 General Elections.

S/n	Name	Prophecy	Source
1.	Primate Elijah Ayodele	PDP will find it difficult to wrestle power from President Buhari come February 2019 election because they refused to do the right thing from the beginning. Unless they put heads together and do the right thing, APC will still come back	Rasaq, 2018, 'Primate Ayodele makes fresh Predictions on winners' of 2019 elections'. https://dailypost.ng/2018/12/23/primate-ayodele-makes-fresh-predictions-winners-2019-elections/
2.	Prophet T. B. Joshua	The election will be closely contested between the two leading political parties but I see Muhammadu Buhari winning	Fikayo, 2019, 'Buhari vs Atiku: How TB Joshua, Mbaka, Iginla, other's Prophecies on 2019 Presidential election came to pass', https://dailypost.ng/2019/02/27/buhari-vs-atiku-tb-joshua-mbaka-iginla-others-prophecies-2019-presidential-election-came-pass/
3.	Pastor Samuel Akinbodunse	Please Nigerians warn Buhari that he is going beyond his boundary. That the Lord said his tenure is once and not twice. If not, he will not see the election o...if he made (makes) a mistake to campaign for elections, before they vote, he will die.	Adeniyi & Omogbolagun, 2019, 'Failed Prophecies on Buhari, Atiku Presidential Poll Contest', https://www.punchng.com/failed-prophecies-on-buhari-atiku-presidential-poll-contest/
4.	Prophet John Ogundele	You may be calculating in your mind that if Buhari doesn't become the president, then it will be Atiku because Obasanjo supports him. Let me tell you as a prophet of God that among Obasanjo, Atiku and Buhari and those who you think are influential (in the country), God said He had withdrawn power from them. None of them will get on to the seat of power.	
5.	Pastor Simeon Akorede	God revealed to me that the incumbent president Muhammadu Buhari is not given the grace to govern Nigeria for a second term	

Source: Compiled by authors (2020).

From **Table 2**, we can see the various prophetic declarations made by Pastors and Prophets prior to the 2019 general elections. It is interesting to note that even before INEC announced the 2019 general elections timetable, prophecies declaring winners and losers were already released. For instance, Prophet T. B. Joshua revealed that Buhari would win the presidential election, Pastor Samuel Akinbodunse said Buhari was only divinely permitted to run for one tenure predicting his death if he did otherwise. On his part, Prophet John Ogundele prophecy centred around the rejection of major contenders for presidency. In a terser note, Prophet T. B. Joshua declared that election may be postponed attributed to many challenges, noting that:

The first time I had the dream, I prayed, I fasted on my own. The second time I had the dream, I also prayed and fasted. But this time, you must join me in prayer because two believers are better than one... Since I got the message that our future is in the valley, I kept to myself. I should not go beyond God; I should go before Him. The Lord said to me that I should tell the nation and the leaders to pray against the interruption of democratic practice. You have to join me in prayer. The Lord gave me what to pray about because in this case, there must be prayers given to you (Oyetimi, 2019).

Amazingly, in the wee hours of the Election Day, the INEC chairman, Prof. Mahmood Yakubu dazed the nation when he announced the postponement of the general elections, citing hiccups in logistics. As a result, new dates for the general elections were subsequently announced by the Commission. While the February 23, 2019 was chosen for both the Presidential and National Assembly elections, March 9, 2019 was for Governorship and State Assembly elections. The elections were successfully conducted on these later dates fixed by INEC. As declared by INEC, President Muhammadu Buhari polled 15,191,847 votes to beat his closest rival Atiku Abubakar, who got 11,262,978 (www.inecnigeria.org).

More frightening was still the prophecy of Prophet T. B. Joshua that “after the elections, there would be lot of situations on ground. To the ordinary eyes, looked very fearful. When the cloud is darker, it’s about to rain. Everyone will start running so that you get home before the rain. That is the situation we are going to face in Nigeria” (Oyetimi, 2019). It was therefore not surprising that the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) rejected the result of the presidential election rather citing results obtained from an alleged INEC server as the authentic one.

According to the party, the alleged server shows that Atiku Abubakar won the presidential with a total vote of 18, 356,732 to beat President Buhari who got 16,741,430 votes (Yahaya, 2019).

Although the Supreme Court had ruled in favour of the All Progressives Congress (APC) concerning the presidential petition brought by the PDP, yet, the National Working Committee of the PDP still took a decision that the Supreme Court ruling be subjected to judicial review (Sanni, 2020). On the other hand, the APC was accused of trying to arm-twist the Supreme Court to review its rulings in both Bayelsa and Zamfara States respectively which gave victory to the People's Democratic Party (PDP). Apart from the above-mentioned cases, there have been other cases both at the national and state levels seeking judicial intervention on electoral issues.

Recent studies have established links between the use of hate speech and prophecies as strategies of political mobilization and instruments to facilitate and justify capture of political power (Ezeibe, et al, 2017; Ikeanyibe, et al, 2017; Acheampong, 2018; Ikem, et al, 2020). As they argued, it creates and reinforces an already fragile atmosphere due to the prevalence of do-or-die- politics and identity politics. It has partly accounted for the migration of citizens from their region of residence to region of ethnic origin during elections for fear of crisis. Apart from going to vote, it was observed that some relocate due to fear of the unknown; in particular, after the 2011 post-elections death of 900 people and the wanton destruction of property amid the deployment of hate speech and prophecies among others (Ikeanyibe, et al, 2017; Ezeibe, 2020; Ikem, et al, 2020). Especially, with prophecies that a certain candidate from a particular region would win, as in 2015, it created arguably the perception of impending dangers and threats to lives and property which subsequently, led to migration of some northerners in the south to the North, and vice versa for southerners.

Popular Mandate or Spiritual Mandate? The 2019 Imo State Governorship Election and its Attendant Security Issues

Before delving into the prophecy-related dimension of the Imo state governorship election, it will be appropriate to put into context the political intrigues and bickering of that election. The Imo state 2019 governorship was not any different from previous elections in the state in the sense

that it was characterized by violence and fraud. For instance, a party agent was killed by suspected political thugs that caused panic; while INEC cancelled results from 252 polling units due to electoral related violence apart from 388 units set aside (Okeoma, 2019; Odinkalu, 2020).

In general, Imo State has 2,221,008 registered voters; while on the day of election 823,743 were accredited representing 37.08% of turnout. There were seventy candidates that contested for the governorship election in the state, only four candidates were considered as major contenders. These included the Nwosu Uche of the Action Alliance (AA), Uzodinma Hope, All Progressives Congress (APC); Araraume Ifeanyi, All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) and the Emeka Ihedioha, Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) (Edozie et al, 2018). Interestingly, the APC governorship ticket was so attractive perhaps due to the fact that it is the ruling party and has the better prospect of winning the state.

However, the most defining moment prior to the primary exercise saw the APC divided over the plan of the then Governor Rochas Okorocha to foist his son-in-law on the party as his successor without resort to the tacit zoning formula. As a result, aggrieved members mainly of Owerri extraction who felt that it was their turn to produce the next governor of the state formed a factional group called the Coalition Alliance, opposed to the imposition of the governor's son-in-law. While those in favour of the governor's move were called Ugwumba Movement, it was in this irreconcilable condition that the APC primary was conducted (Mgbeahuruike, 2018).

As expected, the contention between Coalition Alliance and Ugwumba Movement found inroads into the activities of the national committees mandated to conduct the state primaries. For instance, the APC national leadership mandated Committee led by Ali Ahmed Gulak, conducted its assignment amid disagreement among the members of the Committee which subsequently led to two different results declared.

The head of the electoral primary Committee, Ahmed Gulak, declared Hope Uzodinma winner of the governorship primary with 423,895 votes to beat his closest rival former Deputy Governor, Eze Madumere who got 128,325 votes. Others include Nwosu Uche 10,329 votes, Jude Ejiogu 12,369 votes, Peter Gbujie 12,329 votes, George Eche 16,597 votes, Chuks Ololo

13,645 votes, Chima Anozie 11,071 votes and Chris Nlemoha 9,253 (Mgbeahuruike, 2018). However, dissenting members of the Committee led by the secretary announced Nwosu Uche the winner of the governorship primary with 455,655 to beat his closest rival Hope Uzodinma. Given the contention emanating from the activity of the Gulak's Committee, the national leadership mandated another Committee led by Brigadier General Ibrahim Agbabiaka, who organized a different governorship primary which Nwosu was declared winner, with 269,524 votes to defeat other opponents.

In the meantime, there was a court order that the status quo be maintained with regard to the Gulak's organized primary. After much consultation, the national leadership of APC finally recognized Hope Uzodinma as the authentic flag bearer of the party's governorship election to the chagrin of Governor Rochas Okorocha and his supporters. Hence, Nwosu defected to the Action Alliance (AA) on which platform he contested in the election. Also, Governor Rochas Okorocha and his supporters pledged to support his son-in-law running on the platform of Action Alliance (AA), consequently drawing the irk of the APC. However, after the governorship election, the candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) Emeka Ihedioha was declared the winner having scored the highest votes cast in the election. According to INEC, a total of 739,485 votes were cast, while 714,355 votes were declared valid after 25,130 votes were cancelled. **Table 3** shows the results of the four major contenders in Imo State 2019 governorship election.

Table 3: Showing the 2019 Governorship Election Results of the four major contenders in Imo State				
S/n	Name of Candidate	Party	Votes Received	Remark
1.	Nwosu Uche	AA	190,364	
2.	Uzodinma Hope Odidika	APC	96, 458	
3.	Araraume Ifeanyi Godwin	APGA	114,676	
4.	Ihedioha Emeka	PDP	273, 404	Declared Elected

Source: <https://www.inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/IMO-1.pdf>

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But the election outcome became a matter of litigation as candidates of AA, APC and APGA approached the Election Petition Tribunal to void INEC declaration of Emeka Ihedioha as duly elected because he did not obtain the constitutional one-quarter of votes in at least two-thirds of the 27 local government councils in the state (Yahaya, 2020).

Although the Election Petition Tribunal affirmed the election of Ihedioha, the candidates of APC and APGA approached the Court of Appeal to order for a fresh election for what they termed as irregularities and shortfall in constitutional requirements. Despite coming fourth, the APC candidate, Uzodinma claimed that 388 polling units were unlawfully excluded from his total score. However, the Court of Appeal affirmed the decision of the Election Petition Tribunal by declaring Emeka Ihedioha of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) as the duly elected candidate of the governorship election in Imo state. Still unsatisfied by the court's ruling, Hope Uzodinma further appealed at the Supreme Court for adjudication. Accordingly, the Supreme Court after hearing the case subsequently fixed January 14, 2020 as the day to deliver its judgment.

As is the case with most elections that end up in court, the Imo state elections was hotly contested and disputed. As it is usual for religious leaders in Nigeria, at the beginning of the year to reel out prophecies of possible occurrences in the nation, it was however surprising to hear the declaration of Rev. Mbaka on the anticipated Supreme Court ruling on Imo State governorship case. When he prophetically declared that:

Many things are going to happen in Nigeria this 2020 that will shock countrymen and countrywomen; but all would be to God's glory. In spite of all that would happen this 2020, there is hope. In Imo State, there is hope. Hope, hope, hope in Imo state! A new leadership that will break barriers and there would be joy in the land of Imo. Lift your candles as I bless Hope Uzodinma; and I empower him to, spiritually, to take over (Asadu, 2020).

Stating by what means it was going to happen, was unknown. It immediately attracted criticism from The Human Rights Writers Association of Nigeria (hereinafter HURIWA, 2020), pointing out that the prophecy was no doubt partisan, trying to encourage some forces "bent on creating confusion and chaos in Imo state for their selfish political gains",. stating that the prophecy had

already created a foggy political climate as there were insinuations of conspiratorial plots with the Supreme Court to remove the PDP-led government. According to HURIWA (2020):

There is no doubt that since the religious preacher predicted the outcome of a pending litigation between All Progressives Congress and the People's Democratic Party in the Imo state governorship tussle that is before the highest court in The Land, there has been a heightened climate of uncertainty and political fear of the unknown with a section of Imo state people...

Perhaps, to avoid public anxiety, the state Governor Ihedioha expressed concern over the prophecy, maintaining that the precedence set by both the Election Petition Tribunal and the Court of Appeal, would be further affirmed by the Supreme Court. He, therefore warned Reverend Mbaka to stay clear of politics and face his spiritual call, and at the same time, assured the public not to panic as a result of the prophecy (The Herald, 2020). There were swift reactions from various quarters to the prophecy, as **Table 4** below shows.

Table 4: Reactions to Rev. Mbaka's Prophecy on Imo State Governorship Election.

S/n	Name	Remark (s)	Source
	Imo State Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) Elders	INEC in honesty and transparency in pursuit of its duty as the electoral arbiter, declared Hon. Emeka Ihedioha of PDP the winner. Emeka Ihedioha scored the highest number of votes and fulfilled all the other constitutional requirements...We have absolute confidence in the Supreme Court to uphold justice. We will therefore not take the lawless part of declaring any party as winner.	Odunsi, 2020, 'Imo: Mbaka's Prediction on Uzodinma Unseating Ihedioha is Contempt of Court-PDP elders', https://dailypost.ng/2020/01/08/imo-mbakas-prediction-on-uzodinma-unseating-ihedioha-is-contempt-of-court-pdp-elders/
	Emeka Ihedioha	No matter the garb with which Father Mbaka dresses his comments, what he has said represents a calculated contempt of the highest court in the land, and we believe judicial notice has been taken. This is an unprecedented law in cases of contempt. Even if Fr Mbaka claims to be illiterate or ignorant, these are not excuses in law	Uzoaru, 2020, ' Imo Guber:Mbaka's Prophecy contempt of court-Ihedioha', https://www.sunnewsonline.com/imo-guber-mbakas-prophecy-contempt-of-court-ihedioha/
	National Youth Council of Nigeria (NYCN) Imo State Chapter	We advise Fr. Mbaka to leave Governor Emeka Ihedioha alone. The youths of Imo State are pleased and satisfied with the 'Rebuild Imo' administration. We wonder why Fr. Mbaka focuses his prophecies on Imo State alone with such underlying intents, capable of destabilizing the state. We cannot remember when he prophesied on political developments in other States. We recall how he destabilized Ikedi Ohakim's administration when he bought hook, line and sinker, the road-side gossip that Ohakim flogged a catholic priest	Daily Times, 2020, 'Imolites condemn, mock Father Mbaka over 'fake' prophecy on the State', https://dailytimes.ng/imolites-condemn-mock-father-mbaka-over-fake-prophecy-on-the-state/
	Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) Imo State Chapter	CAN has consistently opposed such politically motivated prophecies and at the same time strived to maintain the standards that guide and regulates the practice of Christianity. We will continue to tow this path until we restore sanity in the practice of priesthood	
	Most Rev. Lucius Ugorji	The Catholic Church is not into fortune telling and so does not authorise any Priest to make

predictions on her behalf on who wins a court case. Anyone who speaks on such a matter is expressing his personal opinion. I do not normally give attention to such predictions because for me they are as good as any guess work. In a true democracy only those who win elections have the mandate of the populace to rule

Imo State Peoples
Democratic Party
(PDP)

People should ignore Mbaka and his prophecy. He is a known APC man and has never seen or said anything good about PDP. He has the history of interfering in Imo politics for reasons we all know of. Everybody knows that Ihedioha enjoys the mandate of the entire Imo people and God. His victory and subsequent court judgements are true reflections of the will of God, and not even Mbaka's prophecy can change that.

Osuji, 2020, ' PDP chiefs slam Mbaka over 'prophecy' on Imo guber', <https://guardian.ng/news/pdp-chiefs-slam-mbaka-over-prophecy-on-imo-guber/>

Sources: Compiled by authors (2020).

Further reinforcing this heightened security climate was the subsequent and yet surprising ruling of the Supreme Court in favor of the All Progressives Congress (APC) candidate, Hope Uzodinma as the legitimate winner of Imo state governorship election. Gleaning from media reports, the shock had to do with how someone who came fourth could be declared winner. According to the Supreme Court, the results of 388 polling units that were excluded did not represent the true score of the APC candidate Hope Uzodinma. Hence, the Court faulted INEC's declaration of the PDP candidate, Emeka Ihedioha, and subsequently declared null and void and accordingly set aside his victory. Consequently, the Court after adding the votes from the excluded 388 polling units to the votes already gotten by Hope Uzodinma, declared him as duly elected having scored majority of lawful votes cast at the governorship election in Imo state.

Again, HURIWA accused the Supreme Court of possible leak of its verdict before it was given. Hence, the Association called on the Chief Justice of Nigeria to openly tell Nigerians why the Court was silent over the "contemptuous prediction purportedly and pointedly claiming that he (Mbaka) has the esoteric knowledge of the outcome of a pending political litigation between the

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All Progressives Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in Imo state" (HURIWA, 2020). This prompted the People's Democratic Party (PDP) national leadership to call for a nationwide protest against the ruling. Thus, in Imo state, there was huge and unprecedented march by members of the PDP, which prompted the quick deployment of both police and military personnel to maintain peace and order in the state. Also, protests across the country were carried out by members of PDP; including Abuja, Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Katsina (Olorok, et al, 2020). Their demands were that the Supreme Court revisits its judgment as well as called for the sack of the Chief Justice of Nigeria (CJN). According to the PDP, anything short of these demands is a call to anarchy, chaos and threat to both democracy and the corporate existence of the country (Ogunwale, 2020). The party insisted that the prophecy of Rev. Mbaka was a garb of APC to justify the robbery.

On their part, Hope Uzodinma and the APC accused the opposition party, Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) of using protests against Supreme Court ruling on Imo state governorship election as a front in their attempt to overthrow the government of Buhari (Shibayan, 2020). It should be noted that the PDP laid claim to the presidency, alleging that its candidate won the presidential election. More importantly was the threat to make Imo state ungovernable by certain supporters of PDP, particularly, cohorts of the former governor, Emeka Ihedioha. This group:

Vowed that they will make Imo state ungovernable for Hope Uzodinma and the APC. True to their threats, they didn't stop at mere propaganda of distracting the government, they threw decency overboard and engaged in physical violence of vandalizing government's property including the recently rehabilitated Owerri water works which saw the citizenry enjoying public water supply for the first time in 20 years. (Udemba, 2020)

Also reported were attacks on the governor's convoy and sponsorship of protests against the government. Meanwhile, the Catholic Bishops of Owerri Ecclesiastical Province had given a passionate appeal to citizens not to take laws into their hands. The Bishops admonished that the already tensed and threat heightened atmosphere should not be worsen by the use of inflammatory statements and unfounded rumours. Exonerating the Catholic Church, the Bishops stated clearly that the "Church does not engage in manipulative political predictions or in divination about prospective judicial decisions. Stating that any Catholic- whether Bishop, priest,

religious or lay faithful- who engages in such idolatrous communications and practices does not speak in the name of the Catholic Church, nor for the Catholic Church (Nigerian Catholic Reporter, 2020).

Conclusion

This paper has argued that the tendentious nature of political prophecies has direct link to security threats. Elections in Nigeria are usually zero-sum competition and mostly conducted in tensed condition and environment. Hence, the tendency for prophetic declarations to ignite claims that may further brew violence is high. In the case of Imo state, the prophecy triggered and heightened a spiral of conspiratorial events especially after the Supreme Court gave verdict favouring the Hope Uzodinma of the APC contained in the prophecy.

Apart from the security related issues, it obviously created a situation of negative perception about the neutrality and impartiality of the judiciary, particularly, the Supreme Court. In this kind of scenario, the people may begin to think that their votes do not matter, thereby, creating political apathy among the electorates. It is therefore based on the above, we recommend that religious leaders should apply caution so as to determine the kind of prophecy to make public in order to avoid precipitating crisis.

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