



Electoral Reform: A Panacea For Electoral Irregularities In Nigeria

AJABOR, Ifeanyi Esq & MORKA B.C

**School of General Studies, Delta State Polytechnic
Ozoro, Delta State. Nigeria**

ABSTRACT

This Paper examined the paradigm shift from intimidation, threat and political violence to enticing voters with food items. This shows the level, the Nigerian politicians have pauperized the common man in Nigeria. It is an insult to common sense to buy or exchange vote in election day with a food pack of rice and bottled water. This paper also x-rayed why Nigerians rig elections and other issues that characterized the Nigerian electoral processes such as political violence, malfunctioning smart card readers, abduction of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Officers among others. Having reasoned from the above it was recommended among others that the Electoral Act should be signed into law before 2023; Nigerian electoral processes should be digitized before 2023; Establishment of an Electoral offences Tribunal that will be charged with the responsibility of trying electoral offenders among others.

Keywords: Elections, Paradigm shift, Organized Labour, Sovereignty, Panacea, Irregularities Sustainable

INTRODUCTION

This work derives from a concern with the contemporary Nigerian Electoral situation. It delves into the paradigm shift from impunity, mayhem, crude and barbarous attack on Nigerian electoral process by armed thugs, uniformed men and some complicit Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) officials used by disgruntled politicians to unleash terror against Nigerians and subvert the will of Nigerians to enticing voters with food items. At some of the polling units visited, cooked rice made with palm oil, popularly known as Banga rice served in disposable food pack alongside with soft drinks and bottled water were given to electorates on the queue.

This work also x-rays the 2019 general elections in Nigeria with a view to show casing a lot of irregularities such as abduction of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) officials, snatching and destruction of ballot boxes and papers to the burning up of INEC office and Electoral materials.

The organized labour in Nigeria notes with disappointment that despite several appeals to our political class to display maturity, civility and total compliance to our electoral laws, rules and guidelines, the conduct of the 2019 general elections left a lot to be desired. Unscrupulous politicians still tried to impose their own rule of brigandage and terror on the electoral process. There were reports of widespread incidences of hate speech, vote buying and abuse of provision for manual accreditation. Even the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was not spared of perennial logistics tardiness which contributed to the spate of inconclusive polls that trailed the 2019 general election.

Organized labour is alarmed that the electoral frauds that characterized the 2019 general election did not only dismantle some achievements made by organized labour and its allies during the 2007-2011 campaign for electoral reform in Nigeria but also presented new problems to the efforts to sustain Nigerian nascent Democracy. (Wabba, AP and Kaigama, B.B, 2019:25-26). This study provides certain strategies and tactics for some issues that are inherent in Nigeria elections. Hopefully, the suggestions herein will make a useful contribution towards reinforcing the beliefs that free and fair election is possible in Nigeria.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework applied for the paper is Section 1(2) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 as Amended which provides that “The Federal Republic of Nigeria shall not be governed, nor shall person or group of persons take control of the government of Nigeria or any part thereof, except in accordance with the provisions of this constitution.

The need for the Federal Republic of Nigeria to be governed by person or group of persons taking control of the government of Nigeria or any part thereof in accordance with the provisions of the constitution cannot be over stressed. The State and the citizens have expressly or impliedly entered into a social contract and the product of the contract is the government.

The only legitimate mode any person or group of persons could take control of the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is expressly entrenched in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 as Amended. It is instructive to note that the need for free and fair election is predicated up on democratic principle and social justice.

Sovereignty or ultimate power in Nigeria belongs to the people exercisable by them by way of the constitution and their votes during elections. Nigerians have political right that is the right to vote and be voted for in an election if they have the pre-requisite requirements. With free and fair elections, citizens are not excluded from power and benefit of power. It makes the citizens to see themselves as joint owners of the polity having hands in the elections of their leaders. The Nigerian Constitution outlaws rigging of elections, revolutions, coup d’etat and any other form of takeover of government by violence or force.

Despite these beautiful provisions of the constitution, it is worrisome that rigging of elections in Nigeria is a way of life. Generally, Government is by consent of the people.

It therefore means that before any person or group of person take control of the government, the people’s consent should be sought genuinely. The general will of the people should be recognized through free and fair elections.

In Nigeria, Political class engaged state apparatus, hoodlums, militants, cultists, religion and ethnic bigots to undermine the general will of the people in elections. Those who forced their way into government have disregarded the will of the people in the process of governance thus compound retrogression and under development. Voters said that no need to vote when their votes will not count and their wills not respected.

Reasons For Rigging Of Elections In Nigeria

Rigging of elections in Nigeria has been a serious problem that has ravaged the Nigerian state beyond repair. The problem has become embarrassing in Nigeria it has become paramount to x-ray the reasons for rigging elections in Nigeria. Some of the reasons for rigging elections in Nigeria are as follows: Fundamentally, the Laws punishing electoral offenders are not in invoked when a citizen commits electoral offences. If there is a feeling among Nigerians that they can get away with serious electoral offences there is certainly going to be an increase in the numbers of electoral offences such as burning of ballot boxes and papers, shooting at polling units, brazen acts of votes buying, intimidation and abduction of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) among others. It is worrisome that when electoral offenders are prosecuted the slowness of the Administration and judicial processes coupled with the chances of winning witnesses on their sides, contributes to the sustainable rigging of elections in Nigeria.

In addition, undue pressure from politicians contributes to the reasons why elections are not free and fair. A situation where Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) adhoc and permanent staff are under pressure from politicians who want to rig elections, in such situation, there is a tendency for the officers to bow to the pressure and acts in a manner which is contrary to established norms or to be identified as stubborn officers to be dealt with in the near future. Again, some adhoc staff became in suborned by politicians considering that they are not permanent staff of INEC and with a lot of them susceptible to the temptation of immediate gratification for a day’s work without consideration for the consequences. (The Nation, 2019.6).

Moreover, the socio – economic environment is an important factor that has greatly contributed to rigging of election in Nigeria among adhoc and permanent staff of Independent National Electoral Commission

(INEC). The increase of materialistic ways of life has resulted in social and moral standard. The pursuit for wealth by Nigerians has increased the desire to look for loopholes to rig elections.

Again, respect for premature accumulation of wealth is another reason why elections are rigged. In Nigeria people do not bother to enquire into the sources of individual's wealth. The rich man is always respected for acquiring their wealth. Against this backdrop, rigging of elections is considered a justified norm. Consequently, rigging of elections is tolerated by Nigerians as long as other individuals are not directly affected by such action, although, they will be paying for it indirectly through bad and irresponsible governance.

Furthermore, in Nigeria, people rig election because of the benefits that accompany paraphernalia of office and big remuneration of politicians. This is why many Nigerians see politics as a do or die business.

In the Nigeria context, power is not a relation but rather a property that is acquired for the sake of what it will bring to the acquirer (Dudley 1973:65). In addition, citizens are not at alert to challenge anybody who intends to rig election. The knowledge that the citizens are not at alert and will meekly submit to unreasonable rigging of election and that they are not prepared to challenge and fight for their rights will not help to rigging of elections in Nigeria. Again, most Nigerians are politically unaware and unconscious of what constitutes their rights and recognize any threat to them. Citizenship education and political awareness provides a potent danger to riggers of election, an arbitrary, despotic and tyrannical government.

Besides, Nigerians that rig elections are not patriots, faithful, loyal and honest with the Nigeria project.

Some Reported Cases Of Electoral Malpractices In Nigeria In The 2019 General Election

The 2019 general elections in Nigeria were characterized with political violence, killings, snatching of ballot boxes and papers, Malfunctioning Smart Card Readers, brazen act of vote buying, intimidation among others.

No fewer than 16 persons were reportedly killed in isolated cases of violence across Nigeria during the Presidential and National Assembly elections. Four persons were reportedly shot dead in Rivers State during the polls while two persons were also killed in Ebonyi State and three injured in a clash.

In Kogi State, information had it that a voter and policeman were murdered. Three persons according to sources died in Lagos, two of them in a ballot snatching incident. Also Gunmen in Zamfara State killed an All Progressives Congress (APC) ward chairman. (Vanguard, 2019:5).

In Lagos, heavily armed men invaded Ago-palace area and disrupted election. During and after the pandemonium, three persons died, scores of voters badly wounded while no fewer than hundred ballot boxes filled with voting materials were burnt (Ibid).

Again, a voter was shot dead at Canal Estate, Lagos, during the bloody shooting; an All Progressives Congress member was stoned to death; and a thug who was beaten to stupor at Avenue Bus Stop later died at 5p.m of the Election Day. Penultimate Friday, The Chairman of All Progressive Congress (APC) in Ohimini Local Government Area of Benue State, Mr. Boniface Okioho was shot dead at Ehatokpe by unknown assailants.

In Akwa Ibom, violence erupted on the eve of the re-schedule polls leading to the killing of one person and the burning of eleven vehicles belonging to Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC in Obot Akara Local Government Area of the state (Amaize, Doru & Emmanuel, 2019: 24).

In Rivers State, residents were horrified by the turn of events after the police confirmed the killing of an officer in the wave of attacks at different parts of the state just before the sudden postponement of the general election of 2019 by INEC.

Six persons were reportedly shot dead at Erema Area of Ogba / Egbema/ Ndoni Local Government Areas of the State while two others were killed in separate attacks at Ozuaha in Ikwerre Local Government Area of Rivers State. Also, in Cross River State Mr. Ayuk Ogar, the Chairman of the People Democratic Party (PDP) in Bende Ekiem ward of Etung Local Government Area and four others confirmed dead following a clash with All Progressive Congress (APC) supporters in the area.

Again, Kano State Police Command confirmed the death of two persons during a bloody clash between Supporters of People Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressive Congress (APC) at Kofa in Bebeji Local Government Area of Kano State (Ibid).

It is instructive to know that in the 2019 elections there was brazen act of votes buying (Ibid). There is a paradigm shift from political violence of votes buying in the 2019 general elections.

In Delta State, there were cases of what could pass as votes buying in some units in Warri and other parts of the state as politicians gave voters One Thousand Naira (₦1000.00) each. Nigerian Police were on the hunt for vote buyers moving with huge sums of money on the Election Day. Politicians also decided to entice voters with food items. At some of the polling units visited, cooked rice made with palm oil, also known as Banga rice served in disposable food packs along side, soft drinks and bottled water were given to voters on the queue.

While some politicians and community leaders gave out the food to voters, irrespective of political party they voted for. Others share them to only persons who voted for their preferred candidates. Women with food carts and makeshift stalls strategically positioned themselves at various polling units from where they dished out the food items to voters after exercising their civil duties upon close supervision by agents and party members of politicians.

It is instructive to note that in all of these, security operators at the respective polling units watched helplessly as the politicians had their ways with the exercise. A police officer told one of the reporters at a polling unit in Ethiope East “It is not a crime to share food to people at the polling unit, what is crime is when they share money to voters, which is vote buying” (Amaize, Jimitota, Ahon Yafughborh, 2019 :9).

The 2019 Imo Governorship Candidate of Action Alliance .A.A, Uche Nwose, said that names of dead people were found among those that voted in the March 9th 2019, election in Imo State. He said the family of the dead people had confirmed the information.

He further said that the story of the dead people voting was the outcome of a forensic survey carried out by his team in the located area. This came after the Tribunal gave order that the votes should be put into forensic survey.

Another problem that characterized the 2019 election was malfunctioning smart card readers. For example, in Bauchi State, the speaker of the House of Representatives Mr. Yakubu Dogaro, had his finger print rejected by the smart card reader. (Vanguard, 2019:5).

Smart card readers designed to aid accreditation by reading permanent Voter’s card were either unavailable or malfunctioning in some areas. (Vanguard, 2019:4).

In the 2019 general election, there were harassments of opposition party members. Reports from Anambra State where the Vice presidential candidate of the People Democratic Party (PDP), Mr. Peter Obi, cast his voted said the running mate cried out that he was being harassed by security agent (Vanguard, 2019:5).

Book Haram attacked in Yobe State was said to have stopped Governor Ibrahim Gaidam from voting (Ibid).

There was violent attack on perceived opponents and intimidation and abduction of Independence National Electoral Commission (INEC) Officers.

In the 2019 general elections in Nigeria, Artisans were equally intimidated. For example, the Vulcanizer who knows that if it is discovered that he did not vote for the ruling party, he may lose his position where he carries out his business, may decide to vote out of fear.

Governor Sariaiki Dickson of Bayelsa State accused the Military authorities particularly the General Officer commanding 6 Division of the Nigerian Army of Subverting the will of the people in electoral processes in Bayelsa State. Unlawful orders were issued by the “GOC” to officers and men who allegedly provided cover for suspected All Progressive Congress Leaders to carry out electoral fraud in some part of the State.

He said the General, and the officers were seen escorting politicians and supervising election in Bayelsa State. He further said that every All Progressive Congress Leaders have hordes of security officers during the election, when there was no enough police officers to man polling units. (Oyadingha, 2019: 12).

The Nigeria Army has regretted that Political thugs were being viewed and addressed as soldiers in the media saying the development has brought its reputation on several occasions to dispute. (Erunke, 2019:8).

Political class in Nigeria, in order to gain mileage, continues to subject the country to ancient electoral rules and analogue voting system.

A Governorship candidate in Benue state was reported caught with a bag full of cash. He was allegedly intercepted by operatives of the anti draft agency, Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) for vote buying.

The incident occurred around a polling unit in North Bank Area of Markurdi. Thugs loyal to the party of the candidate reportedly attacked vehicles belonging to EFCC in a bid to stop the interception. The wads of cash found in the bag were said to have been seized by the EFCC officials (Vanguard 2019:5).

Another serious issue that characterized the 2019 general elections in Nigeria was where collation of results had to be suspended for weeks in Rivers State as all hell was let loose by desperate politicians. The final collected figures were willfully altered. Above all, the none signing into Law of the Electoral Act before the 2019 elections contributed to the un-successful 2019 general elections.

CONCLUSION

This paper examines issues that characterized the 2019 general elections in Nigeria, most especially the paradigm shift from sustainable political violence to enticing of voters with rice served in disposable food packs along side with soft drinks and bottled water to be given to voters on queue on Election Day.

This paper also reviewed why Nigerians rig elections. The result effect of rigging of elections is that the general will of the people is subverted and there is tendency for citizens in the country to resists the state morally and consequently engaged in guerilla warfare to dislodge the defector leader out of office. The paper will finally proffer suggestion with a view of addressing this rubbish that has crippled Nigeria nascent democracy overtime.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Having reasoned from the above, we recommend as follows

1. The Electoral Act should be signed into Law before 2023 and government should make enough funds available for maintenance of hardware and softwares.
2. Elections in Nigeria should be conducted like carnivals, with losers bidding their time till the next elections
3. The government should establish a National institute for election and related elections matter where its certificate would be a pre-requisite for contesting election for any public office in Nigeria.
4. The Nigerian electoral process should be digitized before 2023 general elections.
5. Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should derive the process, mapping out each security agency's schedules of duties so that there would be synergy which for the interest of conduct of free and fair elections.
6. Those arrested for contravening Electoral Law should be duly prosecuted if only it will deter others from committing same electoral offences in future.
7. Politicians who sponsor and or aid thuggery should be made to face the full wrought of the law.
8. The civil society should get actively involved in the electoral processes if the jinx is to be dismantled.
9. Implementation of Justice Uwais Electoral Reform Committee's Report especially recommendations for the democratization of appointment of INEC chairman.
10. Policemen at polling booths should not be armed while Military should not be visible during election.
11. Vote selling and buying could be reduced by giving privacy to the ballot boxes and papers. There should be absolute secrecy and privacy during voting.

REFERENCES

- Appadoria .A. (1978): The substance of politics, London, Oxford University press.
- The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 as Amended
- J. Odok, Director Media & Strategic Communications, COBOM, Delta 4/5/19, Coalition by Buhari/ Osibanjo movement, COBOM, Whatsapp.
- The Nation Tuesday, 30/4/19, page 6: poll: INEC asserted Independence, says CTA report.
- May Day Address of the President of the Nigeria Labour Congress. Comrade Ayuba P. Wabba, mni and President fo Trade Union Congress; Comrade Babboi Bala Kaigama, presented at the 2019 May Day celebration organized by the Nigeria Labour Congress and Trade Union Congress at the Eagle Square, Abuja.
- The Nation, April 30, 2019: 6
- Dudley B. (1973): Instability and political order: politics and crisis in Nigeria, Ibadan: University Press.
- Buhari loses in Aso Rock as Atiku fails: to win polling unit. Vanguard February 24, 2019:15.
- Amaize, E, Duni, P and Emmanuel, H (2019): 24 “When Election Kills” Vanguard, February, 24, 2019.
- Amaize, E, Jimototao, Ahon, F Yafugbor H, E Iheamnachor and Brisibe, P, “Politicians entice voters with cooked rice, drinks, biscuit in Delta and Cross Rivers State”.
- Nwosu, U (2019) “How dead people voted in Imo” Vanguard May 7, 2019: 34
- Oyadonghas, S, (2019) “Dickson slams military over alleged complicity in electoral fraud” Vanguard, February 25, 2019: 12
- Erunke, J (2019) “Polls” “Politicians Kitting thugs with uniforms, arms to impersonate soldiers- Army,” Vanguard, March 11, 2019:8
- Vanguard (2019) “Apathy, killing marked Governorship and state” Assembly Polls: March 10, 2019: 5.