

NIGERIA'S ELECTORAL SYSTEM IN NEED OF SCIENTIFIC UPGRADE FOR SMOOTH AND SUCCESSFULLY ACCEPTED OUTCOME.

ONMOKE SYLVESTER.

Department of Christian Religious Education
Benue State College of Education, Oju.
Benue State
fronmoke@gmail.com

Abstract.

World-over, the conduct of general elections are made easier through the use of scientific and technological devices. Countries with greater populations around the world employ electronic means of voting and counting, such that elections are easily conducted with faster, credible and acceptable results. Nigeria has remained with its traditional system which is outdated, non-fashionable and crude manual devices. No doubt such elections results are bound to be unacceptable, and also contested at tribunals. Free, fair and credible electioneering processes might continue to elude Nigeria for years to come. On this platform, I wish to propose an establishment of scientific and technological methods be adopted in Nigeria. The case emanating from fraud elections, manipulation of voting processes and declaration of rigged results would lead to voter's apathy, it could result in violence and subsequent death of innocent people. More advanced countries with larger populations like India, Indonesia and United State of America etc conduct their elections electronically, the processes there are generally acceptable. They are devoid of manipulations. Why would Nigeria not adopt such scientific technological systems? Nigeria has grown over the years and has become the leading Nation in Africa, we stand as role models to smaller African countries, and ironically the level of our development has not been fully harnessed. Talents abound, human resources are plentiful and the push for our advancement are still untapped. This paper therefore, wishes to seek ways of improving our electioneering processes for more acceptable and credibly worked systems in Nigeria. This paper calls for an electronic voting process in Nigeria.

Keywords: Election, Voting, Electronic Voting and Credible election

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria has undertaken several elections since independence up to date. Nigeria has practiced democracy at her beginning since independence, it was truncated several by the military. Our current attempt at democracy has been on for above two decades of uninterrupted democratic practice. The hallmark of a genuine democracy is credible, free, fair and acceptable outcome. How has Nigeria fare in this regard? Have there not been violent rejections of election results even at the last general elections? Have the looser not sought justice even up to the apex on all occasions? Therefore, when shall the electoral regulators get it right in Nigeria? The regulatory body INEC (Independent Nigeria Electoral Commission) has seeming fancied dancing to the tone of the government of the day, not until Professor Jega led body deed the unimaginable, letting the incumbent government lose the 2015 general elections. The process was not free, fair and credible though but Nigerians needed a change.

NIGERIA'S 2019 ELECTIONS

The most widely praised as the best system of government in our contemporary world is democracy, which allows for high level of people's participation in decision-making and policy formulation through representatives. A major determinant of democracy is the electoral process that provide the electorate the institutional framework for choosing representatives through a competitive free and fair election. The emphasis of this paper is on the challenges of conducting free and fair elections and its impact on the democratization process in Nigeria. Relying on secondary data on elections in Nigeria, we established that elections have been marred by unprecedented abuse of electoral process in form of election rigging, ballot box snatching, inadequate and late arrival of voting materials at polling centres, vote buying, connivance between the ruling party elites and INEC to manipulate and even declare false elections result and so on. Based on these observed abuses, we emphasize representative democracy cannot be consolidated or triumph where there is negation of democratic principles. Could be a functional special electoral malpractice court for presentation of offenders? For INEC to become an autonomous and really independent body? Haven seen in a flash what Nigeria dished out as the 2019 general election in the whole world view, make the call for modernization more timely now than ever.

HAS NIGERIA'S ELECTORAL PROCESS IMPROVED SINCE INDEPENDENCE?

Even before returning to democracy in 1999, when the military allowed political associations which led to the 1993 elections, the electoral process was still in order;

1. Remembering the election of social democratic party which almost brought Moshood Abiola to Power, it was still largely commendable. Abiola, then a southern Muslim, captured most of the votes in the North; unfortunately, he was not declared winner.
2. In 1999, Olusegun Obasanjo and Olu Falae, both contested the presidential election and as southerners, each got a fair share of votes from the North. The candidates enjoyed the support of all Nigerians and the process was fair.

However, when you look at the elections Late Musa Yar'Adua, Goodluck Jonathan and now Muhammadu Buhari, you will see that elections were rarely a resemblance of democracy. This is not about whether any one likes anybody or any political party or not. A new system of rigging has surfaced such that election results of some polling units are deliberately doctored so as to increase or decrease a political party's chance of winning an election. This is not good for our electoral process and it is a bad commentary on the government of the day. Now that the 2019 general elections had come and gone; what remarkable difference have been seen? Have the processes not followed the pattern as since independence era? I can say categorically that our Electoral process has improved since independence, not sagastically though. In all ramifications, no progress was made.

If we look at elections conducted before 2011 and 2015, they were characterized by violence and ballot box stuffing. "Ghosts" used to vote during our elections but with the innovations introduced by INEC this has reduced to a reasonable level such acts.

One expects that with the introduction of smart card reader, this should have tackled or detected fraud in the electoral processes but even at this, we have had an acceptably free and fair elections that stand the test of time. There are still issues that must successfully be tackled to make the process better and one of such is vote buying.

Prof. Bolaji Omitola asserted,

According to Lekan Oketokun; “We have an upsurge in incidents of vote buying, excessive monetization of the electoral process, intimidation, and politics of brinkmanship by various gladiators bordering on desperation to grab power at all cost. All these do not point to an improved electoral process”.

TOWARDS EFFECTIVE ELECTORAL PROCESSES IN NIGERIA.

Nigeria has for long been in constant search for effective electoral processes, as an integral part of its transition to democracy. A long history of badly or poorly conducted elections has, until recently, created profound skepticism amongst ordinary Nigerians about the utility of electoral democracy. The relative success of electoral democracy, the relative success of 2011 and 2015 general elections, seem to have revived hope amongst Nigerians that with determined effort, their votes could indeed count. Hopes and expectations that the new civilian government would pave the way for better governance that would satisfy the needs and aspirations of ordinary Nigerians over-shadowed the flaw of the electoral process and the dynamics of the politics of transition under military rule, which circumscribed, if not tele-guided, the elections, as observed by **ATAHIRU JEGA**. What can be done newly? I would suggest six major ways, to ensure effectiveness of the electoral processes.

1. STRENGTHENING THE ELECTORAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The constitution 1999 (as amended) and the electoral Act. 2010 (as amended) contain the essential elements of a sound legal framework for the conduct of elections in Nigeria. However, According to A. Jega; “There is tremendous scope for improvement to ensure a more robust legal framework for greater effectiveness in the conduct of future elections.” INEC has identified all the areas where improvements are needed. Regrettably, no amendment came into effect before 2015 as well as 2019 general elections, why then can Nigeria not become laughable object before the world today?

2. PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE AND ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITY BUILDING

With the restructuring and reorganization of INEC after the 2011 elections, a lot of additional work is required, according to David Mark, “For upgrading the professional competence of staff, through a range of capacity building and skills provisioning training programmes. Rigorous training of both the permanent and temporary staff as INEC ensure well for efficiency and effectiveness in electoral services delivery.

3. INCREASING KNOWLEDGE SHARING AMONGST AFRICAN ELECTION MONITORING BODIES.

According to Atahiru Jega; there are many good electoral practices amongst the African EMBS, which we can share with each other. There is indeed even scope for sharing electoral resources, in addition to sharing knowledge and experiences” (A. Jega Nov. 10, 2015). He concludes that: “INEC should play a leading role in driving this and other mutually beneficial initiative”.

4. STRENGTHENING FINANCIAL AUTONOMY OF THE COMMISSION

To a large extent effectiveness of electoral process is conditional on availability of funds to deliver efficient services consistent with international minimum benchmarks and global best practices. Electoral processes cannot be effective if an EMB is starved of funds and/or has to go cup in hand to an incumbent executive begging for funds before it can conduct an election.

5. INCREASED ENGAGEMENT WITH STAKEHOLDERS.

Bringing about free, fair and peaceful is not the business of INEC alone. All stakeholders and indeed out citizens have roles to play. Regularized and periodic meetings between INEC and political parties, civil society bodies, security agents, development partners and many others would safeguard and make elections work.

6. TECHNOLOGY ADAPTATION FOR TRANSPARENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS

There is no doubt that increasing use of adaptable technology in carefully selected areas goes a long way to ensure transparency and effectiveness of the electoral processes: E.g. The technology for biometric registration of voters, the use of smart permanent voters card (PVCs), the voter verification and authentication of the registered voter card and server processing data and result collation are highly commendable. There are, however many challenges in the use of technology; e.g. Lack or inadequacy of original equipment or spare-parts. Lack of security for data, its storage or adequate internet facilities, etc hinder proper usage.

CONCLUSION

As the 2015 general elections clearly show, Nigeria has come of age, but with the 2019 election; much was left to desire. We therefore, need to forge a strong stakeholder alliance for the consolidation as well as expand the scope of the use of technology in Nigerian electoral process for greater transparency and effectiveness as it is done in advanced countries and larger population than us; fair, free, credible and peace elections are what Nigeria desires. Litigations, rankles, agitation and violence is the bare of political success in Nigeria today,

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