

Effect of Nigeria Electoral Reforms on Vote Buying and Electoral Violence in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

Ebajemito Joan Mojishola

Department of Public Administration
Kogi State Polytechnic Lokoja Nigeria
joanmojisholae@gmail.com

Abstract

Electoral violence and Vote Buying has been a major roadblock to democratic processes in Nigeria. This research argues that the Nigerian democratic procedures has been under perpetual threat since 1999 that the Fourth Republic began, hence there is need for transformation of the electoral processes using modern technology and other measures to curb vote buying and violence during elections, the main objective of this study is to assess the damage done to electoral processes through this cankerworm and to also discuss transformation procedures to curb this menace. The study adopted a survey research design. The survey used the primary and secondary sources of data. Decision making theory is the theoretical framework adopted for the study. Among others solution to Vote Buying and Electoral Violence is the Placement of CCTV Camera's in all polling units and proper prosecution of political thugs in courts of law to serve as a deterrent to others.

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1. Introduction

Elections consist of procedures and process for choosing officers or making binding decisions concerning policy by the voting of those formally qualified to participate as a corollary to the conduct of free and fair elections. Electoral politics began in Nigeria in the 1920's with the introduction of elections principles by the 1922 Clifford Constitution. This Constitution was very symbolic as it served as a landmark in the electoral history of Nigeria. According to Ezera (1960) Nigerians were for the first time allowed to exercise their political rights by voting their own candidates during elections, consequently, other constitution that emanated after 1922 improved on the elective principle. These preceding Constitutions further expanded the scope of electoral participation. In every modern society, election and democracy are classified as essential ingredients of development. There is no doubt that election has been a factor in Nigeria's political development since independence, even in pre-independence era, it played significant role both at the national and regional levels, but the fact remain that post-independence elections in Nigeria have a unique feature of crisis, which has affected the growth of democracy.

Nnoli (2019) opined that, every election that is contested either in the developed democracies or the Third World etc., under one party system, two party system or multi-party system must have some elements of malpractices of fraud, however, the degree and variation of those malpractices in electoral process cannot call for the abolition of elections. Electoral violence and vote buying thus constitutes a limiting factor for the consolidation of democracy, as such violence has led to injuries, deaths, arson, dissertations of election materials, harassment of political opponents and their supporters including innocent citizens. A new dimension of paying for the vote and which most Nigerians call "Vote Buying". These, therefore, constitute a problem that requires urgent attention for the consolidation of Nigeria democracy.

According to Aniekwe and Kushie (2011), the first election that held in Nigeria after independence was in 1964, and the poll witnessed the killing, boycott, malpractice and other forms of violence. From the commencement of the fourth republic in 1999, electoral violence has continued as the previous era. Aniekwe and Kushie further opined that, the election of 1999 was accepted to ease out the military regime that had ruled for over thirty years. Durotoye (2018) contributed that "the 2003 General Elections and till dates witnessed the killing of opponents, electoral malpractices, manipulation of results, use of thugs, harassing of voters and electoral officers. A new dimension of vote buying publicly with the highest bidder winning the election has taken over Nigeria electoral processes. That is to say, there is now an increasing awareness among contemporary Political Scientists that crisis and other forms of civil strife are always associated with exercise of power which needs urgent transformation of the electoral processes to curb this menace. Most times political candidates that can deliver and lead well are not given opportunities because they do not have money to buy the votes.

2. Theoretical Framework

The Nigerian electoral process and vote buying can be explained by several theories, including: Institutional Corruption Theory, Principal-Agent Theory, Rational Choice Theory, Social Exchange Theory, amongst others. This survey is anchored on Social Exchange Theory was propounded by George C. Homans, a sociologist, in his 1958 essay "Social Behavior as Exchange". This theory views human relationships as a series of exchanges where individuals seek to maximize their rewards and minimize their costs (Lawal, 2018).

Basic Assumptions:

- Rational Decision-Making: Individuals make rational decisions to maximize their benefits and minimize costs in social interactions.
- Cost-Benefit Analysis: People evaluate relationships based on their costs and rewards.
- Self-Interest: Individuals are motivated by self-interest and seek to maximize their rewards.
- Reciprocity: Social exchange involves reciprocity, where individuals expect something in return for their actions (Lawal, 2018).

Usefulness:

Social Exchange Theory helps explain how relationships are formed and maintained. It's useful in understanding various social phenomena, such as:

- Romantic relationships
- Friendships
- Workplace relationships
- Consumer behavior

Criticism:

Critics argue that Social Exchange Theory oversimplifies human relationships and neglects the role of emotions, empathy, and altruism. It also fails to account for power imbalances and social structures that influence relationships (Lawal, 2018).

Relevance to the Study:

Social Exchange Theory can help explain the dynamics of Nigeria's electoral process, particularly in terms of vote buying and voter behavior. For instance:

- Voters may exchange their votes for material rewards or promises of future benefits.
- Politicians may use patronage and clientelism to maintain power and influence voters.
- The theory can also help understand how social relationships and networks influence voting behavior in Nigeria.

Overall, Social Exchange Theory provides valuable insights into the complexities of human relationships and social interactions, including those in the context of Nigeria's electoral process.

3. Objective of the Study

The objectives of the study are the following:

- (1) To investigate the key electoral reforms introduced in Nigeria in the Fourth Republic.
- (2) To determine the correlation between vote buying and electoral violence in Nigeria.
- (3) To examine the extent to which electoral reforms have impacted on vote buying and electoral violence in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.
- (4) To find out ways of strengthening electoral reforms in Nigeria.

4. Methodology

This paper made use of qualitative design. This means that data analysis was done qualitatively. Qualitative data analysis focuses on expressive data that provide descriptive details majorly in narrative form to examine the aim and specific objectives of the study (Chioke, 2022). In this regard, qualitative descriptive method of analysis involves explanation or descriptive analysis

regarding the generated data for the objective of the study (Arinze, Osegbue&Osuji, 2022). Therefore, secondary sources of data were utilized by the researcher in the course of this study. Chioke (2016) noted that, “This source comprises of already written or published works by different authorities documented in books, newspapers, magazines, notes, journals, official government documents and articles.”

5. Literature Review

Elections:

In its strictest sense, there can never be a democracy without election. No wonder Auglund (2007) is quick to point out that “a political system is democratic to the extent that its most powerful collective decision-makers are selected through fair, honest and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes, and in which virtually all the adult population are eligible to vote. Election is an integral part of a democratic process that enables the citizenry determine fairly and freely who should lead them at every level of governments. Periodically and take decisions that share their socio-economic and political destiny. Anifowose (2003) define elections as the process of Elite selection by the mass population in any given political systems. Bamgbose (2012) opined that elections provide the medium by which the different interest groups with the nation state can resolve their claims to power through peaceful process. Elections therefore determine the rightful way of ensuring that responsible leaders take over the mantle of power. An election itself is a procedure by which the electorate, or part of it, choose the people who hold public office.

Electoral Process

The electoral process includes the Registration of voters, selection of candidates, and the voting procedures. In Nigeria, each state has the power to establish bye-laws regarding voter requirements and the frequency of state-wide elections especially Local Government elections. However, because the national government establishes federal election requirements, many of the states generally adopt the same rules and practices to reduce expenses and avoid the complexity of having two different system. There is a Commission known as Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) that is responsible for the Nigeria electoral process. General elections are elections conducted in Nigeria for federal and states elections positions. Omotola (2013), the Nigeria electoral process needs a lot of transformation, because election has become the only game in town, shaping and reshaping public discourse and political actions.

Stages of Nigeria Electoral Process

Nigeria like most democratic countries operates the secret ballot. A ballot is a paper containing the candidates of each party vying for a particular electoral position. In Nigeria, the presidential, senatorial, Federal House of Representative, Gubernatorial election, State House of Assembly elections comes up every four years. There are various stages for election in Nigeria, since elections are conducted periodically into various political offices across the 36 states including the federal capital territory.

Stage 1

Under stage one, are the following:

- a. Establishment of Electoral Commission which is known as INEC in Nigeria.
- b. The appointment of National INEC Chairman who is responsible for all elections regarding the state and federal.

- c. Establishment of state INEC offices including the federal capital territory and appointment of state INEC Commissioners to see to the smooth running of election in the state of jurisdiction.
- d. Registration of political parties that dully meet INEC requirements. Political parties are registered on a continuous basis by the electoral commission.
- e. Registration of voters using electronic means like Data Capturing Machines, Smart Card Reader, also the newly introduced Bimodal Verification Accreditation System (BVAS). The BVAS is through thumbprint and factual expression. INEC portal pop un information of the voters Bio-data.

Stage 2:

Primaries: There is always a primary election where the flag bearers of each party are chosen to represent their parties during elections.

Stage 3: The stage include the following:

- (i) National Conventions and General elections.
- (ii) Formulation of Electoral Act –The electoral rules and regulations and usually drafted by government or the Electoral Commission and passed into law by the legislature.
- (iii) Delimitation of Constituencies –the Electoral Commission arranges to divide the country into constituencies are usually specified in the constitution or the electoral law.
- (iv) Registration of candidates –the Electoral Commission registers candidates who are qualified to participate in the elections.
- (v) Appointment of Electoral Officials –in Nigeria, the commission recruits a large number of ad-hoc staff who assist it in conducting elections. They include retiring officers, presiding officers and polling officers.
- (vi) Publication of Voters Card –it is the responsibility of the Electoral Commission to publish and display the electoral register before the election.
- (vii) Establishment of polling stations –the Electoral Commission establishes polling stations and publicize their locations.
- (viii) Voting –the Electoral Commission fixes dates for the elections after due consultations with the governments and parties. Voting is done during daytime and in the presence of party agents.
- (ix) Counting votes –counting of votes is done by the presiding officers and his polling assistants in the presence of party agents.
- (x) Collation and Announcement of Results –Result from the various constituencies are collated at a specially designated venue. The final results are then announced by the Electoral Commissioner who is usually the only person authorized to do so.
- (xi) The final stage is Litigation and Court Processes –aggrieved candidates and political parties who feel the election was not free and fair, seek redress in a court of law. It is only the court that gives judgment and justice for aggrieved candidates.

Electoral Violence

Some scholars argued that there is no agreeable definition of electoral violence. This is because of the contentious issue of violence “begets violence” developed by Frantz fanon in the era of anti-Colonial struggles. The fanonian argument is predicated on the fact that “Violence provokes violence” so those who retaliate to the first violence of political opponents do not agree that they are perpetuating violence (Igbuzor 2010).

(Igbuzor 2010) further defines electoral violence as “any act of violence perpetuated in the course of political activities” including pre, during and post-election periods and may include any of the following acts, thuggery, use of force to disrupt political meetings or voting at polling stations or the use of dangerous weapons to intimidate voters and other electoral process or to cause bodily harm or injury to any person connected with electoral processes. Election violence can be perceived as any form of election related violence. Adetola (2007:224) added that “election violence generally involves political parties, their supporters, Journalists, agents of government, election administrators and the general population which also include threats, assault, murder destruction of properties, physical or psychological harm”. In a nutshell, electoral violence is any random or organized act or threat to intimidate, physically harm, blackmail, or abuse a political stakeholder in seeking to determine, delay or influencing an electoral process.

Vote Buying

The distribution of a material benefit to an individual voter in exchange for support in a ballot. Some scholars view vote buying as a simple economic transaction which involves parties and candidates distribute material benefits to individual citizens in exchange for support at the ballot box. On the objective side, vote buying is an illicit business and as such, does not take place within a “normal” market protected by social and legal Norms. In Nigeria electoral process, vote buying has become a phenomenon whereby contenders for elective positions use money as an inducement support which is not based on persuading the electorates to vote according to their wish. Alemika (2004) opined that vote buying in its literal sense, is a simple economic exchange where candidates ‘buy’ and citizens/electorates sell votes as they buy and sell apples, shoes or television sets. The act of vote buying by this view is a contract or perhaps an action in which voters sell their votes to the highest bidder.

Causes of Electoral Violence and Vote Buying in Nigeria

1. **Over Concentration of Power:** Due to over concentration of power at the centre, there is therefore the mad rush to acquire power because it provides the holder the authority to distribute the allocation of natural and material resources.
2. **Ethnicity:** Ethnicity is conceptualized as manipulation of ethnic identity. The need of ethnicity was sown during British Colonial rule which has fully nurtured and promoted from 1960. Ethnicity poses serious challenges to democratic rule in post Independent Nigeria.
3. **Poverty and Unemployment:** Poverty and unemployment have been intractable obstacles to free and fair election and democratic development in Nigeria since independence. The bid of economic survival has led many into thuggery, hooliganism, selling their votes, and rigging in elections.
4. **Electoral Corruption:** There also have been cases of bribery among the elections actors such as polling agents, retiring officers and even Electoral Commissioners. When the electoral body assigned with the responsibility of managing elections are corrupt, the end product of the elections always end in shambles.
5. **Election Rigging:** Some political parties sees rigging as a norm that must be adhere with. This development often produces leaders who cannot harness and manage the resources of the nation as well as build up a solid democratic foundation.
6. **Violence:** Most Nigeria politicians adopt violent, insulting, damaging and confrontations style of campaign which is not healthy for democracy.
7. **Colonial Heritage:** The formation of the Nigerian nation as a colonial package with an ambiguous foundation is like a wound that refuses to heal.

8. **Northern Domination of Leadership:** Colonial heritage which transferred powers to the north gave the northern impression that leadership is their right, while economic dominance is the right of the south.
9. Nepotism and Greed is also a big factor.

Electoral Reforms

Electoral reforms change in electoral systems to improve how public desires are expressed in election results. The digital age of the 21st Century is transforming the electoral process which has brought online voting and opened up communication between citizens and politicians. Electoral reform is change and can also be referred to as reform. Its primary goal is to improve electoral processes through fostering enhanced impartiality. First, with a reformed electoral system to possess technical merit, there is need for a practical and consistent means in the electoral system to get a change. There is also need to be specific of areas that need reforms.

Forms of Electoral Violence

Electoral violence can be classified into three broad categories namely: Adoke (2011):

- (a) Pre-Election violence
- (b) Violence during election.
- (c) Post-Election violence
 - (i) Pre-Election violence occurs mainly at the stage of party primaries, when contestants from same political party jostle for tickets to become party flag bearers; at the stage, vote buying, thuggery, arson, shooting and maiming are deployed to achieve a particular objective.
 - (ii) The pattern of violence at the election stage is not remarkably different, however, snatching of ballot boxes and papers, kidnapping or abduction of electoral officers and party agents. Forcefully preventing voters from exercising their franchise, forcing electoral officers to altar, manipulate or deface results sheets suffice.

(iii) The third category which is post-Election violence, manifests in the same manner as pre-election violence through looting, arson, and wanton destruction of lives and properties by aggrieved stakeholders and opportunists as well as members of a political party that lost an election. Ojo (2007) warned that there appeared to be an emerging trend of burning of offices of the commission at a time when the commission is engaged in massive movement of election related materials nationwide. Electoral violence also constitutes a dishonest form of electoral manipulation, just like other forms of electoral malpractices. Electoral violence induces fear on the electorate, this is one of reasons why many eligible voters do not even register or have voters' cards in the first place. The incident has caused various levels of setback in the preparation for the general elections in Nigeria and many forms of electoral violence emerge yearly in Nigeria elections.

Electoral Reforms Introduced in Nigeria

Since the Fourth Republic begins in Nigeria in 1991, INEC has introduced many dimension to electoral processes all in the view to curb electoral violence and vote buying. It is expected that

electoral reforms will contribute to better participation of the citizens in electoral practices. Over the years, Nigeria elections have offered the electorate little or no genuine choice.

- Reforms in Technology guarantee a free and fair election, e-voting can reduce electoral manipulations.
- Also, INEC requires a new electoral law where e-voting, e-recording all over Nigeria will be used, but this is been hampered because some part of the Electoral Act was turned down by National Assembly. Also, some communities are yet to be connected to ICT usage.
- The National INEC chairman needs someone with good pedigree that cannot be manipulated, but INEC is not given free hands to do the job.
- There is also need for CCTV cameras to monitor and record election.
- Huge sums of money are required to increase the budget of INEC.
- More purchase of adequate BVAS Machines. The new introduced BVAS has advantages since it reduces rigging and electoral malpractices.

Impediments to Electoral Reforms in Nigeria

As the 2023 elections draws nearer, INEC is still facing some major challenges as follows:

- Expanding voter access to polling units in the context of a growing population as a result of growth of new settlements and continuous voters' registrations.
- Amendment of the Electoral Act that will improve the conduct of free and fair, transparent elections was rejected by the National Assembly.
- Deepening Modern Technology in the electoral process which has become imperative.
- Rolling out voting machines for election is a big problem especially as in the case of Anambra, Ekiti, Ondo, and Osun elections.
- Other challenge is the possible malfunction of the Smartcard reader and data's of some electorates which often deprive some people from voting.
- High rate of advancement in electoral malpractices and with a huge rate of selling and buying votes is worrisome to INEC.

5. Findings

Analysis showed that the conduct of elections in Nigeria can be improved through national integration, judicious use of political power for the benefit of all. The study established that just like Alemika (2014:16) opined, doctoring of results, imperfect conduct of elections, thuggery, injustices, amongst others generate electoral violence in Nigeria. Vote buying has also become a norm in Nigeria elections; even the electorates are ready to sell their votes. People are easily deceived by money and politicians have discovered this and always use it to get voters on their side. This in a way helps to militate against the development of democracy in Nigeria.

It was also discovered that INEC have a good plan for free and fair credible elections in Nigeria, as a result wants the Electoral Act be amended to give room for complete e-elections, but parts of it was not signed into law by the president and National Assembly. The reason given is that

Nigeria is not ripe for complete e-election where e-voting can be introduced to curb manipulations of figures.

This work also discovered that INEC as the main body in charge of election in Nigeria face a lot of challenges. Among which are lack of adequate and functional modern technology in the electoral process and rolling out voting machines for election is a big problem. Also, the possible malfunction of Smartcard readers, and other electronics used for elections is a major fear for INEC.

The study also discovered that there is a correlation between vote buying and electoral violence in Nigeria. Electoral reforms have impacted on vote buying and electoral violence in Nigeria's Fourth Republic to a large extent. This work also discovered that a new method has been added to vote buying where the voters before collecting the money for the vote must snap ballot papers to ascertain he or she actually voted for the party buying the vote. If there are collaborative efforts on all stakeholders to find out ways of strengthening electoral reforms in Nigeria it will help to curbing vote buying and electoral violence in the country.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that Nigeria electoral process is a structured system, with a commission name INEC as the body that is recognized by law to prepare, plan and conduct elections. INEC in the process of exercising this power go through a lot of challenges. Vote buying and electoral violence are major challenges that have hampered free and fair elections in Nigeria. New methods of electoral malpractices are been introduced daily. Hence, there is need for CCTV cameras to monitor and record elections. Some of the challenges INEC go through can be checked, reviewed, evaluated and reduced using modern technology.

Recommendations

This work is of the view that, in order for INEC to overcome the major challenges that erupt in Nigeria electoral process, the following recommendations will go a long way to help Nigeria have an improved electoral process:

- (i) Technology assessment presumes that new innovation should be evaluated by test running the technology in question before the general elections. Hence, the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) and other Electoral bodies Involved in elections in Nigeria should do the test running of those technology before using them in the conduct of elections.
- (ii) INEC should ensure that Direct Data Capture machine in the Commission should be replaced in the interest of efficiency and effectiveness. The capturing should include fingerprints, picture of the voters and even Natural Identification Number (NIN).
- (iii) Nigeria government should ensure that adequate punishment are meted out to erring and corrupt INEC ad-hoc staff, retiring officers, and electoral commissioners.
- (iv) The government should ensure that there should be a provision in the constitution that any politician that employs the services of thugs and hoodlums in order to harass, maim, kill his political opponents should be sanctioned, arrested and if found guilty jailed.

- (v) Also, the government should ensure penalties for electoral misconduct and malpractices, as contained in the 1999 constitution and the Amended Electoral Act 2011 should be strictly applied by both INEC and the judiciary. Culprits of electoral fraud must be punished in-line with the provisions of the law.
- (vi) The government and all electoral bodies should ensure that CCTV cameras and other monitoring gadgets should be placed in election venues and polling units to capture and record whatever is happening. This will reduce vote buying and electoral violence.
- (vii) The government should make sure there is a comprehensive electoral reform in which all stakeholders including Civil Society Organizations (CSO) and International founders and observers ensure that the quality and credibility of elections in Nigeria are not compromised.
- (viii) There is need by the government to encourage the culture of opposition parties is of crucial importance to the future of Nigerian democracy. Most Nigeria politicians always prefer to be on the winning side and strike deals with the winning party of incumbent parties. This always returns bad politicians to power.
- (ix) This work suggested that only BVAS machines must be used in all elections Nigeria henceforth by the government of Nigeria.

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