

X-Ray of Ekiti State Governorship Election in Nigeria, 2022

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Abstract

This paper x-rays the Ekiti State governorship election in Nigeria, held on the 18th day of June, 2022, relying on qualitative approach and using materials put together from secondary sources. The Ekiti State governorship election, 2022 left notable mark in the Nigeria electoral and political history. The election also gave an insight on how Osun State governorship election in July 2022 and general elections in 2023 would be. This paper also peruses at the pre-election issues, political culture of Votes buying and selling, Bi-modal Voters Accreditation System (BVAS) and other issues that surfaced in the Ekiti State Governorship election, 2022. The study finds that if the political culture of Votes buying and selling subsist among the political barons in Nigeria in elections, at the long run, the best man for the mantle of leadership may not win election. This paper finally made some recommendations that would serve as panacea to the political culture of votes buying and selling during elections in Nigeria among others.

Keywords: Democracy, election rigging, election, buying and selling of votes, ultimate power, electorates, guerilla warfare.

Introduction

In Nigeria, power is conferred permanently on some group of persons. This makes leadership not to be accountable to the people. A situation wherein the leadership is not accountable to the citizens and elections are not held, when elections are held, they are not free and fair. Elections in Nigeria are characterized with violence, thuggery, intimidation and threat. Nigeria operates a more or less a one party system. Some political barons in Nigeria make a caricature of democracy as they are always succeeding themselves in office. This is abuse of power.

In Nigeria, politics has been rubbished and the political right of the citizens has been vandalized. The right of the Nigerian citizens to vote and be voted for has been buried. Nigerians are not allowed to participate in the political process. They are excluded from power and benefits of power. Despite the fact that they have the pre-requisite requirements to vote and be voted for, they are not allowed to vote and be voted for. Nigerians do not see themselves as joint owners of the polity having no hands in the elections of their leaders in most time. Nigerians see government as an external body from which they are alienated. The relationship between the political leaders and the electorates is characterized by hostility and mutual indifference. Against this backdrop, the political leaders in Nigeria have personalized their rule and see the state as their personal estate and administrative issues as personal matters. They failed to establish boundaries between

private and public interest. They do not regard the state as a public property, political power is thus personalized.

Billy Dudley asserts that in the Nigeria context, "power is not a relation" but rather it is a property that is acquired for the sake of what it will bring to the acquirer.

Politicians in Nigeria are over developed. The overdeveloped nature of the politician is used to control, intimidate and subjugate the Nigerian masses. The politicians are overdeveloped apparatus of the state. Rigging of elections, all sorts of oppression and suppression are carried out by them.

The need for free and fair elections cannot be over emphasized. The State and the citizens have impliedly entered into a social contract and the product of the contract is the government. The only way any person or group of persons could take control of the government is expressly entrenched in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, as amended. The ultimate power in Nigeria belongs to the people, exercised by them by way of the constitution and their votes during elections. Nigerians should see themselves as joint owners of the polity having hands in the elections of their leaders. The constitution outlaws rigging of elections, revolution, coup d'état and any form of takeover of government by violence or force. Despite these salient provisions in the constitution, it has not been able to stop rigging of elections in Nigeria.

Before any person or group of persons take control of the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The consent of the electorates should be sought genuinely and the general will of the people should be recognized through free and fair elections. Free and fair elections encourage potential foreign investors to the country as it portrays Nigeria in good light.

Where there is no free and fair elections, there is the tendency for aggrieved groups in the society to vehemently resist the state morally and consequently engage in guerilla warfare to dislodge the de-facto leaders out of office. Leaders who forced themselves into power through fraudulent elections are not respected by the electorates but feared by the electorates. Nigeria leaders are usually autocratic, conscious of their position, very assertive and they do not have trust and faith in the people. Non participation of the citizens in election is as a result of rigging of election that is premised on violence.

We are going to peruse at the Ekiti State governorship election in Nigeria, 2022 won by Abiodun Oyebanji of the All Progressives Congress (APC) but Engr. Segun Oni rejected the results of the election protesting that the election was characterized by massive votes buying and other electoral irregularities. In Nigeria, election is a do or die affair, politics has become Hobbesian. Power is achieved by all means and struggle for political power is a way of life in Nigeria. This has made many Nigerian voters to develop political apathy.

Adekanye (1990): posits that because of the history of electoral fraud, elections in Nigeria are often associated with tension, crisis and even violence.

When the interests of the people are articulated in a responsible election, the incumbent government tends to enjoy the sovereign legitimacy of the people but in a situation wherein

rigging of election is the dictate of the day, the interest of the electorates could be thwarted.

Conceptualization of Terms

Democracy: Although many definitions have been given but there is no agreement on definition. According to Schumpeter (1947), democracy means only that the people have the opportunity of accepting or refusing the men who are to govern them. By this, democracy implies conducting elections and choosing leaders that will represent the majority. Rousseau and Rivero (2003) see democracy as the power of the people as it manifests in ways of thinking, behaving, and organizing that enhance participation in and influence over the decisions affecting their everyday lives. This kind of process can come through, public debate, election and representation-building of consensus and formidable decision-making.

Election Rigging: Election rigging according to Nwabueze (2003) refers to electoral manipulations which are palpable illegalities committed with a corrupt, fraudulent or sinister motive to influence an election in favour of a candidate(s) by way such as illegal voting, bribery, treating and undue influence, intimidation and other form of force exerted on the electorates, falsification of results, fraudulent announcement of a losing candidate as the winner (without altering the recorded results).

Election: This facilitates and shapes democracy. Democracy is regarded as the best form of government because its ideology promotes peoples' will. The people have political right to decide who should govern them in a free and fair conduct called 'election'. Therefore, elections constitute an essential principle in liberal democracy. Election in a democracy is very important because it is through which that the expression of the people are shown via legitimacy and leadership succession. According to Dickerson M. et.al (1990) election is defined as a post mortem that investigate the record of office holders whose actual performance may have little to do with promises made when they were previously elected. This is a way of censuring, reposing function in a ruler that is popularly accepted and rejecting an unpopular leader. This method shuns mutiny and chaos in a system hence it reflects peaceful hand-over from one administration to the other so long as the process is devoid of election rigging.

Literature Review

Elections in Nigeria are like war. In short, election process is war in Nigeria. During electioneering period, the economic and social activities are affected. Military tanks, armoured tanks, raffles and materials for war and displayed in every look and crannies of Nigeria. Thus, armoured vehicle were imported into the country for the police shortly before the elections (Sagay 1995:23). Sometimes, seaports, airports and borders are closed. Thugs and militant are hired and paid for violence. Elections in Nigeria is very chaotic, violent and disputed.

Gunmen chase electorates away from polling stations. Political thugs made away with ballot boxes and or stuffed the ballot boxes with unlawful votes.

Thugs and underage voters took the center stage. Community leaders and other leaders of thought did the voting on behalf of their communities.

Iyayi (2004) posits that elections are a complex set of activities with different variables that act and feed on one another. That election can be defined as a "formal act of collective decision that occurs in a stream of connected antecedent and subsequent behaviour. It involves the participation of the people in the act of electing their leaders and their own participation in governance. He further says that elections are not necessarily about election day activities although it forms an important component. It encompasses activities before, during and after election. It includes the legal and constitutional framework of election, the registration of political parties, party campaigns, the activities of the electronic and print media in terms of access, it includes campaign financing, the activities of the security agencies and the government in power.

It includes the authenticity and geniuses of the voters register. It includes the liberalism of otherwise of the political process in the country and independence of the adjudicating bodies of elections.

Iyayi further says that government in power always allocate votes to candidates as they wished. All the elections were characterized by threats of or actual assassination of political opponents. The security agencies either simply stood by while these crimes were being committed or took active part in facilitating the electoral frauds in order to assist the government in power. In some situation, political parties candidate who did not stand for elections were returned as having won election.

Statement of Problem

Elections in Nigeria are do or die affairs. During elections political thugs and gunmen recruited by politicians chased voters away from polling station. Political thugs carry away ballot boxes and or stuffed the ballot boxes with unlawful votes. Thugs and underage voters were involved in multiple voting and took the center stage. Community youths and leaders of thought did the voting on behalf of their communities. On the election day, fake voters' register was used. Votes were not counting in election; votes were allocated to the highest bidders and political party candidates who did not stand for election were returned as having won election.

Research Question

The following research questions are designed to guide the study.

- (i) Should elections in Nigeria be do or die affairs.
- (ii) Should political thugs and gunmen recruited by politicians chase away voters from polling stations and stuffed ballot boxes in election day.
- (iii) Should community youths and leaders of thoughts vote on behalf of their communities in election day.

- (iv) Should fake voters' registers be used in election day.
- (v) Should votes count in elections in Nigeria.
- (vi) Should a person who did not stand for election as a candidate be returned as a winner in an election.

Objectives of the Study

The major objective of this study is for elections in Nigeria to be free and fair.

The specific objectives are to

- (i) examine why elections in Nigeria are characterized with do or die affairs.
- (ii) examine the roles of political thugs and gunmen recruited by politicians to chase voters away from polling stations in election day.
- (iii) examine why communities' youths and leaders of thought vote on behalf of the communities in election day.
- (iv) examine usage of fake voters register in election day.
- (v) examine why votes do not count in elections in Nigeria.
- (vi) examine why candidate who did not stand for election should be returned as a winner in an election in Nigeria.

Pre-Election issues in Ekiti State

Before the Ekiti state governorship election, 2022, there was a turbulent campaign period marked by several notable interparty clashes and some people died in the clashes. Also, there was ruinous divides within Ekiti State Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) compared to Ekiti State All Progressives Congress's (APC) post primary election reconciliation along with the draw of Oni's candidacy.

Prior to the day of the election, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) deployed eight resident Electoral Commissioners and four National Electoral Commissioners to Ekiti State. Beside about seventeen thousand officers and men of the Nigeria police were deployed to Ekiti State and INEC partnership with Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) to reduce vote buying during the election was cosmetic.

Sign preceding the 18th day of June, 2022 Ekiti State governorship election were very ominous, lives were lost. Momentary peace, akin to the peace of grave yard has pervaded Ekiti State. Skirmishes, Violent clashes among the three prominent political parties, All Progressives Congress (APC), Social Democratic Party (SDP) and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) were recorded on daily basis from Monday, 13th day of June, 2022. Detachment of heavily armed soldiers took over strategic areas and flash points in Ekiti State, while combined forces made up of men from the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, Police and Army were constantly embarking on patrols of major roads and highway in Ekiti State.

Buying and Selling of Votes

In any election where votes buying is the order of the day, common sense should dictate that the highest bidders win. The greatest challenge facing the Nigeria electoral system is the issue of votes buying on election day by money bags. Votes buying and selling remain the bane of Nigeria electoral system.

It was severally reported that all the political parties that participated in Ekiti governorship election 2022 were accused of engaging in vote buying and selling. In addition, votes buying in election is travesty of democracy, it is a rape on democracy and clear day light robbery. Vote buying and selling in Nigeria have dealt a huge blow to sustainable democracy in Nigeria. Nigerian's elections have been bastardized due to various forms of electoral irregularities which have denied Nigeria free and fair elections.

All the political parties that participated in the Ekiti State governorship election 2022 took advantage of Nigeria's state of abject poverty and exploited it by buying votes of indigent Nigerians. It is difficult for a man who is very hungry to resist cash. Some of the voters have children who are also voters and all their votes were bought in the election. Impunity for votes buying and electoral bribery is widely prevalent in Nigeria electoral system. Votes buying is malpractice connected with vested interest. The effect of votes buying cannot be over-emphasized. It is interesting to note that votes buying encourages poor governance and weakens citizen's capacity to hold their elected officials accountable for their actions. Besides, buying of votes rather than contesting fairly for votes, there are possibilities that such candidates and sponsors will show a disregard for democratic rules and disposition to adopt illegal means becomes inevitable.

Card Reader

With a view to reducing electoral malpractices that have always marred Nigeria electoral system, Card Reader device was introduced to Nigeria's electoral process. Card Readers was first used in Nigeria presidential election held on the 28th day of March, 2015. The Card Reader is a portable electronic voting authentication device configured to read only the Permanent Voters Card (PVC) of a particular polling unit on election day. It is designed for the accreditation process before voting. It was unfortunate that the Card Reader could not remedy the problems that are inherent in Nigeria electoral system. Illegal printing of voter's card, falsification of election results, illegal compilation of fake voters' lists' were still holding sway in Nigeria electoral system. With the introduction of card reader, voting processes were slow as it were when there was no card reader.

Another issues that was associated with card readers was that the card reader has no facial authentication device for voters during accreditation, it has no device for sending results from polling units to Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) central portal at Abuja and card reader uses incident forms during accreditation on an election day. With a view to upgrading the Card Reader device. Bimodal Voters Accreditation System (BVAS) was introduced to the Nigeria electoral process.

Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS)

Bimodal Voters Accreditation on System (BVAS) is an electronic device designed to read Permanent Voters Card (PVC) and authenticate voters. President Mohammadu Buhari, President and Commander-in-chief of the armed forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria signed the Electoral Act, 2022 into Law on the 25th day of February, 2022. With BVAS, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) can transmit results straight from the polling unit to its national Collation center in Abuja. Bimodal Voters' Accreditation System (BVAS) was first used in the Isoko South constituency 1, bye election in Delta State on the 10th day of September, 2021. It was observed that the device had problems in capturing the thumbs and faces of some Voters, especially the aged. This has been corrected by Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

Again, in Anambra State governorship election held on the 6th day of November' 2021 the BVAS malfunctioned and that led to the extension of voting time from 2:30pm to 4: pm. Also, in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Areas Council Election held on the 12th day of February, 2022, the BVAS machines had issues. The Ekiti State governorship election was the first election to be conducted after President Muhammadu Buhari signed the Electoral Act 2022 into Law for the first time in the history of elections in Nigeria. In the Ekiti governorship election, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) transmitted results electronically. To its portal at Abuja. The usage of BVAS machines in Ekiti State governorship election, 2022 served as a litmus test. It is interesting to know that about three thousand, three hundred and forty-six BVAS machines were used in Ekiti State for the 2022 election.

Success of the Bimodal Voters Accreditation System

In the first place, BVAS makes voting proceedings faster as against the card reader. It verifies the authenticity of the Permanent Voters' Card (PVC), finger prints and or facial authentication of voters during accreditation. It uploads the polling unit results to Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) results viewing portal (IREV) in appropriate on election day. It acts as the INEC voter enrolment device (IVED) during voter registration. Its usage has also eliminated the use of incident forms during accreditation on an election day. BVAS prevents any form of electoral malpractice and possible disenfranchisement of voters.

Challenges of Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS)

Firstly, quality internet access is a fundamental challenge as remote areas in Nigeria do not have 4G network. The device requires 4G technology for convenient download. Secondly, Biometric technologies and related matching processes cannot be expected to work with hundred percent accuracy.

Thirdly, lack of training for the ad-hoc staff by INEC on the efficient usage of the device.

Other issues that surfaced in the Ekiti State Governorship Election, 2022

The security agencies charged with the responsibility of maintaining law and order compromised during the Ekiti State governorship election, 2022.

Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) whose duty is to prevent votes buying and selling could not stop votes selling and buying in the election.

Another issue that characterized the Ekiti State governorship election, 2022 was that polling units were situated in private residences and compounds.

In addition, there were over concentration of voters in certain polling units, where other polling units had fewer voters. For instance, at Surajudean School, Ado Dallimore (Ward 9), Ado Ekiti, which had about five thousand registered voters shared between only two polling units.

Recommendations

Haven reasoned from the above, the following recommendations were designed with a view to correcting issues that are inherent in electoral processes in Nigeria.

The National Assembly should expedite action in the passage of Electoral Offences Commission Bill into Act with a view to punishing Electoral offenders in Nigeria.

Political parties should sensitize their members to avoid inter-party clashes and politics should be seen as a sport played in the spirit of sportsmanship.

The theory of zero sum game wherein winner takes all should be discouraged in Nigeria politics with a view to reducing inter-party clashes during election.

Political parties should adhere to the rules and regulations as provided for in the party's Constitution. Primary elections of political parties should be free and fair. The principle of fielding unpopular candidates who lost primary election in their parties should be discouraged.

Independent National Electoral Commission should investigate alleged votes buying and selling, undue influences, intimidation and other electoral offences by political parties.

Independent National Electoral Commission should prosecute those arrested for electoral offences.

There is the need to consolidate Citizenship and Political Education in all our level of education with a view to inculcating nationalism and patriotism in the mind of the citizens.

The citizens should be informed that vote selling and buying during election discourage poor governance and reduce citizens capacity to hold their elected officials accountable for their actions. There should be political revolution against money politics.

The government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria should improve the standard of living of Nigerians, Nigerians are living in penury and abject poverty. A hungry man is an angry man. A hungry man can do anything to survive including selling of his conscience and votes.

Before the 2023 general elections the whole country called Nigeria should be covered with 4G network with a view to enhancing the Performance of BVAS machines. In the fourth coming 2023 general elections.

Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should commence the training of ad-hoc staff on the efficient usage of BVAS machines.

Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should take urgent steps to remove polling units from private residences and compounds and INEC should decongest some polling unit, with a view to reducing stress voters would undergo during elections.

Nigeria should sustain BVAS if Nigeria wants to get the electoral process right. With BVAS Nigeria electoral process is getting to near perfect.

Conclusion

The Ekiti State governorship election in Nigeria held on the 18th day of June, 2022 was not free and fair against the backdrop of sales of votes that characterized the election. Almost all the political parties that participated in the election were alleged to have bought votes. Mr. Abiodun Oyeboje of the All Progressives Congress (APC) won the election but the Social Democratic Party (SDP) Governorship candidate Engr. Segun Oni rejected the results of the elections protesting that the election was marred with colossal votes buying. Conclusively, BVAS has paid off handsomely in Ekiti State governorship election, 2022.

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