

VOTER CARD TRADING AND POLITICAL CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA: AN ANALYTICAL EXPOSITION OF 2019 DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS IN TARABA STATE, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

Political conflicts are endemic in Nigeria and this is flowing from the context of its historical development, such that, a holistic approach is necessary to identify the factors that fan the embers of any conflict in Nigeria, just as in many other ill-defined federal states with plural identity groups where intergroup conflicts are common, and precipitating factors are most often, the skewed distribution of socio-economic and political resources which breed inequalities amongst culturally and sometimes religiously different groups. In juxtaposition of a structure with such prevailing practices, there will be attendant perception of injustice and marginalization wherein certain groups will construe enemy images of the government and other groups who appear to be favored by it. The study recognizes that such structures differ from place to place, and conflict management should be situated within the conflict environment. It also inform the approach of analysis of the structures and actors in such conflict contexts, like the social, economic, political, and security dimensions in any given conflict situation. As democratic elections remain indicators of early warning of violence in many states in both rural and urban settings, a study on the Permanent Voters Card (PVC) trading is necessary to determine its relationship to political conflicts with a focus on the 2019 elections violence in Taraba State and Nigeria as a whole. Bilateral bargaining theory of vote buying was the basis of the study. The study took a historical and descriptive approach, while the methodology relied on field survey, both primary and secondary sources of data were employed; such as interviews, participant observation, public documents, and library and online

resources. The study recommended that the electoral management body (INEC) should be better positioned to discharge her responsibility of electoral management and mitigate conflicts emanating from political activities for sustainable peace and development in the society.

Keywords: Voter card trading, Political conflicts, Democratic Elections, Analytical Exposition, Taraba State.

Introduction

In Nigeria, one major reason for political conflicts remain electoral fraud and sundry political manipulations, that have bedeviled political elections with different scenarios of violence being played out through her political history from as early as the first Republic in 1960 -1966 where electoral process culminated in the civil war of 1967 -1970. Interestingly, electoral upheavals that occur at the epicenter of the polity do also resonate at the Federating states. Nigeria, since its return to democratic rule in 1999 has been inundated with political conflicts and the North East geopolitical zone has had more than a fair share of it with attendant negative social, economic and political impact on the citizenry. These conflicts have been attributed to systems and structures that negate the aspirations of the governed, fierce competition for resources and consequently inability of groups to co-exist. The situation is dire for this region as poverty is one endemic factor. According to the UN Global Multi-Dimensional Poverty Index 46% of Nigerians live below the national poverty line and the North East Region is one of the worst with 76.8% under the poverty line (Health Sector Bulletin).

The study on voter card trading and political conflicts in Taraba State in the 2019 election stem from the premise that the geographic space presently known as Taraba State has a bequest of political conflicts making violence a recurrent index in her political experience which date as far back as 1959 as stated by Best (cited in Otite and Albert 2007).

Taraba State was created in 1991 as a continuing process of spatio-political devolution which started in 1963, to make Nigeria a politically stable and economically strong country. It lies largely within the middle of Nigeria, within the tropical zone, with a vegetation of low forest in the southern part and grassland in the northern part. Taraba State has many distinctive attributes; it is the third largest in land mass, most numerous in ethnic groupings, with an approximate number of 73 languages.

The historical and cultural implications for Taraba State is that of a people with a high propensity for political conflicts considering its plurality, economy governed by natural resources, and the cultural beliefs and attitude regarding scarcity; the diversity in religious inclinations: Christianity, Islam and traditional institutions.

The element of party politics has impacted the political space in Taraba State as there have been a record number of upheavals in the polity attendant with the practice of democracy with its tenets such as: elections and election procedures/processes. One such is the provision of permanent voters card (PVC) and use of card reader. The manipulations involved in these processes as (voter card trading) for political gains have lighted a dimension of political

conflict hitherto not foreseen as: robbery and snatching of voters; detaining eligible voters from going to polling units to exercise their franchise; killings, maiming, constraints on freedom of movement of voters, and destruction of the properties of supporters of opposite camps following election outcome. It is the objective of this paper to do an analytical exposition of this factor with Taraba State as a point of incident, the view being the entrenchment of democratic gains as sustainable peace and development for Nigeria in general, and Taraba State in particular.

Theoretical framework

The bilateral bargaining theory developed by Stefan Napel (2002) is explored for this work. Bilateral bargaining style can be described as a determination between two or more people or groups to cooperate for a purpose and share the outcome/payoffs accordingly. Both in politics and life, everyone needs interaction to enjoy the maximum dividend of one's action. This has canvassed for a series of interaction, negotiation and bargaining in everyday life as seen in (Dauda, 2019). People enter into agreements with their fellow human beings in order to achieve certain purposes. Arguably, this has made political parties and their candidates to lobby the masses with series of campaign promises, gifts and device persuasive means to canvass for votes. Therefore, the offer and acceptance actions by both the political parties' candidates and the masses amount to what could be described as vote trading.

The propriety in adopting this theory buttresses the argument of an unequal bargaining power, because irrespective of how strong the electorates' wills and determinations towards voting for candidates of their choice, failure to control parties and candidates spending towards election could jeopardize the freedom to select a right candidate. Aside from the fact that such act affects voters' freedom, vote buying mostly has a great influence on masses especially the illiterate ones. This unequal relationship tilt the bargain in favour of the buyers, (political gladiators and actors) as the token being given to the voters in exchange for their votes is the opportunity cost of the social infrastructure they are perpetually denied by our political leaders. Truth be told, there is no "free" goods and services offered by politicians in a bid to woo voters that they will not recoup with interest when they get voted into power (Ojo, 2019).

In applying the bilateral bargaining theory the blame game goes not just to, the various institutions of government but, also looks at the direction of those people (the citizens) who elect these politicians as part of the problem. Schaffer and Schedler (2005) in (Adekola, 2019) explains the idea of "vote buying" as a simple economic exchange where, "candidates "buy" and citizens "sell" their votes. To "buy" literally involve the conscious use of money to pay for a particular commodity or service between two agreeing parties. However, in this case, the circumstances are different as most politicians never come bearing gifts with the intention that they are buying the votes and the conscience of the citizens. The (politicians)) come under the influence of alleviating poverty, and contributing to the economic development and lives of the people. Therefore, vote buying does not happen under any legal contract to prove that a particular commodity was bought or sold, and in turn an obligation to fulfill such particular bargain on the part of the seller (citizen) is made.

Perspectives on voter card trading and political conflicts

Voter card trading

Generally, voter Identification card is a document which ascertains a person's identity as an adult citizen of a country, and is primarily used in casting one's vote in Municipal, State, and general elections. It is used by the Election Commission as Electoral Photo Identity Card. It can be used as a general identity, address, and age proof for or purposes such as transactions or applying for a passport (The Economic Times). In Nigeria, the permanent voter card (PVC) is a document conferring legal status and franchise to qualified persons to vote. It is issued by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) the electoral umpire conferred with the responsibility of election management as provided by the Electoral Act 2010 Sections 9, 22, 23, 24.

Voter card trading is the practice whereby some politicians buy PVCs from gullible electorates in order to reduce the voting strength of their opponent during election. Some political candidates buy up the cards in their opponents' strongholds, to suppress turnout, the goal is also to keep opponents' voters from casting ballots. As stated by Prof. Mahmood Yakubu Chairman Independent National Electoral Commission, it is

"A new method of vote-buying devised, in which some partisan actors go round buying up the PVCs from voters or financially inducing them to collect the Voter Identification Numbers on their PVCs...

By collecting the PVCs, their intention may be to deprive the voters of voting since no one can vote without the PVC. By collecting their phone numbers and bank details, the intention is to induce voters by electronic transfer of funds to their accounts since it will be difficult to buy votes at polling units" (Ojo 2019).

As enunciated by Dauda, Owasa, Adekola and Olumide, Olu-Adeyemi, vote buying has negative consequences on Nigeria's democracy. In the Country's nascent democratic experience, the new voter card system was introduced to prevent election irregularities and fraud that have promoted political violence in the society, while securing the integrity of the vote for peace and development.

In 2012, the process of rolling out "Permanent Voter Cards" began to an estimated 70 million eligible voters, the cards are designed to be used in conjunction with 182,000 card readers being distributed nationwide. According to the commission's spokesman Nick Dazang "What the card reader seeks to do is to enhance the credibility and the integrity of the process."

However, penultimate the 2015 general elections, which was the first time the permanent voter card and the card reader would be used, Nigerians, were wary as to whether the voter card system will prevent election fraud. The skepticism was aptly amplified by one expert who stated that "The cards may go a long way in making at least one part of the voting process transparent, but they won't eliminate fraud altogether" (Muhammad and Stein 2015).

In reports of studies conducted by (Matenga, Ikeano, A. Ojo), the view is that vote-buying has reduced Nigeria's electoral politics to "cash-and -carry democracy", created endemic poverty, promoted political corruption through access to security votes, compromise security agents and election officials, raises the cost of elections, lead to voter apathy, put unpopular and incredible contestants in positions of authority and institute bad governance. Sale of PVC deprive voters of not just their franchise, but also their right to transact as it is an identity card; and it is an abuse of fundamental human rights (freedom of conscience).

Political Conflicts

Political conflict is violence perpetrated by people or governments to achieve political goals. Political conflicts do not concern individuals as such but groups of various kinds. They involve directly or indirectly state institutions. They require a "political solution", that is, a solution achieved through discussion and not through violence (Canivez, 2008).

Political conflicts comprise firstly of electoral violence which is a subset of activities in a larger political conflict and secondly, electoral violence is seen as the ultimate kind of electoral fraud. Electoral fraud has been defined as 'clandestine efforts to shape election results' and includes activities such as ballot rigging, vote buying, and disruptions of the registration process. Both approaches focus on the goal-oriented or instrumental character of violence.

Electoral violence can be perceived as any form of election- related violence. It is 'any violence (harm) or threat of violence (harm) that is aimed at disrupting any part of the electoral or political process during election period' (Adetula 2007) in (Ojo 2016). This perception assumes that 'election violence generally involves political parties, their supporters, journalists, agents of government, election administrators and the general public which include threat, assault, murder, destruction of properties, and physical or psychological harm'. The definition by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), sees electoral conflict and violence as 'any random or organized act or threat to intimidate, physically harm, blackmail, or abuse a political stakeholder in seeking to determine, delay or to otherwise influence an electoral process'.

Election conflicts can fall into four related categories according to the typology of electoral violence: intra-party feuding, inter-party clashes, electoral event violence, and communal unrest. What comprise electoral violence, and the three dimensions it can manifest are physical, psychological, and structural forms. It is also revealed in the IFES survey of 2001 and 2002 that, electoral conflict and violence can occur at five intervals in an election chronology, namely:

- Identity conflict can occur during the registration process, when refugees and other migrants from conflict regions are unable to establish or re-establish their officially recognized identities.
- Campaign conflict can occur as rivals seek to disrupt the opponents' campaigns, intimidate voters and candidates, and use threats and violence to influence participation in the voting.
- Balloting conflict can occur on Election Day, when rivalries are played out at the polling station.

- Results conflict can occur when there are disputes over election results and judicial mechanisms are unable to resolve such disputes in a fair, timely and transparent manner.
- Representation conflict can occur when elections are organized as 'zero-sum' events and 'losers' are left out of participation in governance.

The same survey also revealed four descriptive categories of conflict and violence that emerged. These categories suggest a variety of motives, victims and perpetrators:

- Voters in conflict with the state and claiming unfairness in the election process;
- The state in conflict with voters who challenge the election results or the electoral hegemony of the state;
- Political rivals in conflict with each other for political gain
- A blend of the above three categories, (Fischer 2002 cited in Ojo 2016.)

Historical dynamics of voter card trading and political conflicts in Nigeria

The practice of vote buying can be seen as questionable, and can be called anything but it is not new to Nigeria's recent electoral experience, neither is it new to Nigeria's electoral politics or only restricted to Nigeria or Africa. According to Matenga (2016) "nearly 80% of voters from 36 African countries believe voters are bribed – either sometimes, often or always. Vote buying was a common phenomenon in Nigeria's history upon its independence, and the extension of democratic tenets; concomitant with the practice also, were a myriad of political conflicts.

Vote markets thrived in the early days of democracy in Western Europe, but development in her economy brought it under control. When younger democracies were established in developing countries, vote markets reduced or were nonexistent in many African countries. However, Dauda, Ahmad, and Keling (2019) in their report on democratic systems, show that vote markets have returned to political systems of many countries particularly, Africa. Some authors view vote buying as part of the essential features of electoral practice in recent democracies, but the manner at which most players are involved in the act is what makes it otherwise, ignoble. Vote buying is a form of political clientelism but, vote buying or trading may or may not necessarily affect free and fair election but indirectly, the voters interest might have been bought by parties.

The history of elections in Nigeria is marked by incursions of the Military into the political space with transition to democratic rule, and it is argued that elections organized by the military were better and more peaceful than the ones conducted by incumbent civilian regimes, the common feature of all post-independence election in Nigeria is that they have been characterized by allegations of fraud, and prone to violence (Ibeano & Orji 2014). The 1979 and 1999 general elections were marked by allegations of irregularities, while the 1993 elections were inconclusive following the annulment of the results of the presidential elections. In all the three general elections, there were reports of violence before, during and after the polls.

Elections organized by incumbent civilian regimes with the exception of the 2011, were flawed by irregularities. This pattern was reflected in the simulated 'landslide' victories recorded by the ruling parties in the 1964 contested by the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) and the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA). The NPC and its allies in the NNA took advantage of their control of the federal government to gain a controversial victory that year. A similar story took place in the 1983 general elections when the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) which won the presidency and gubernatorial elections in seven out of the 19 states in 1979, attempted to extend its political power throughout the federation. The allegation of vote manipulation in the 1983 triggered violent protest in some parts of Nigeria. The 2003 and 2007 general elections were also allegedly manipulated. The magnitude of the electoral offences committed during the 2007 provided the grounds for observers to conclude that the elections were the most fraudulent in Nigeria's history. This led to reforms of the electoral process by the Electoral Reform Committee a body inaugurated by the federal government to suggest measures that would improve the conduct of elections restore electoral integrity and strengthen the quality of democracy in Nigeria. Some of the committee's recommendations were reviewed and included in the amended Electoral Act. The federal government also appointed a leadership which was widely regarded as credible for the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). For its part, INEC embarked on a series of internal reforms to strengthen the electoral process. These measures culminated in the relative success that was achieved during the 2011 general elections.

Although the 2011 general elections were widely seen to be credible, three major issues which have direct bearing on civic and voter education in Nigeria affected the elections. The first is the outbreak of post-election violence which led to the death of more than 800 people. This is seen as the worst election related violence in Nigeria. The second issue relates the very high number of rejected or invalid votes in the 2011 presidential election which was put at nearly 1.3, or more than 3 per cent of all votes cast. In addition, there was high level of voter apathy leading to low voter turnout in many areas, particularly in the South -West zone. The low voter turnout and high number of invalid votes are indications that more still needs to be done to improve the effectiveness of civic and voter education in Nigeria.

In spite of its efforts, huge gaps exist in INECs civic and voter education as witnessed in both the 2015 and 2019 general elections in Nigeria. This underscores the social and political situation in Nigeria, and shows how it, along with the country's political background, defines the context for understanding the basis for and nature of civic and voter education programme for the country.

Voter card trading and political conflicts in Taraba State

The case in Taraba state penultimate 2019 general elections and after as regards pre and post-election violence is worrisome. In the words of Anthonia Ojo (Ojo, 2019), in every election cycle in Nigeria since independence in 1960, the problem has always been how to deal with issues relating to election management, such as ineffective resource management, poor preparations, civic/ voter education and security. This is why lots of PVCs ended up with third parties maybe by proxy, stolen, snatched, or deliberately sold by INEC to politicians and their agents.

Method

The Authors focused on issues of voter card trading and political conflicts during the 2019 elections with particular reference to Taraba state. It deployed the qualitative method to gather data while the research design comprised of participant observation, interviews, and secondary sources as documented published newspapers. A total of 10 respondents were involved in the study, of those interviewed, 5 were staff of Public Complaints Commission in Jalingo, while 3 were members of the public, and the other 2 were aggrieved participants affected by the ignorable practice (including one of the authors).

Results of the Findings

The study revealed the reasons/rationale for the sale of voter card, the effect on election outcome in Taraba State and its impact on political development of Taraba State which are not much different from reasons for sale of voter card elsewhere in Nigeria. Broadly categorizing these reasons into two: first, we have the structural causes relating to underlying power structures prevalent in Nigeria and secondly, the causes related to the electoral process and the electoral contest itself.

- Top on the list is recent technological innovations such as the introduction of handheld devices to read biometric voter identity cards and electronic tracking of electoral materials, which has vastly reduced traditional forms of rigging. Hence, politicians have come to realize that falsification of election results in order to emerge winners is becoming counter-productive, especially as the judiciary has also annulled many rigged elections. They have therefore resorted to wooing voters with money, foodstuffs, clothes and other souvenirs in exchange for their voter cards.
- Secondly, our respondent should that the reason for sale of voter cards is the nature of do-or-die politics in Nigeria and, indeed Taraba State. The State has domineering power over the society in every facet of life. Capturing political power, therefore translates to capturing all other things. This point is succinctly reinforced by the argument of (Ake 1996) in (Yusuf 2019), that:

The State is in effect privatized. It remains an enormous force but no longer a public force, no longer a reassuring presence guaranteeing the rule of law but a formidable threat to all except the few who control it...

- The third reason is that of social division as: ethnic, religious or a plethora of other dividing factors often exploited through elite political dialogue. Groups act based on social inclinations to deprive supporters of political opponents of their voter cards so as to weaken the strongholds of such opponents.
- A fourth reason adduced by the respondents for sale of voter card is the money politics and financial gains. The gains of political office are so enormous that aspiring politicians to certain offices do whatever is possible to get there. It is clearly seen that the attractive nature of public office engenders an investment mentality. On this point, (Yusuf, 2019), aptly explains that, political investors and other major financiers of the

political process for individuals seeking political office expend huge sum of money on the electoral process with expected returns.

- The element of security vote also is a factor that has contributed to vote buying. Security votes are monthly allowances that are allocated to the 36 states within the Federal Republic of Nigeria for the sole purpose of funding security services within such states. However, the failure to subject the funding to legislative oversight or independent audit allowed successive Presidents and State Governors to treat it as a slush fund and direct it to political activities, such as buying votes during elections. In fact, lack of robust auditing and accountability mechanisms have meant that some incumbents embezzle the funds outright.
- The fifth reason is the weakness of the economic foundation of democracy as seen in high levels of poverty. An interviewee commented that what usually make people to involve in election fraud are poverty and unemployment. Furthermore, the North-East geopolitical zone as shown by the UN Global Multi-Dimensional Poverty Index is one of the worst with 76.8% under the poverty line (ibid). Attendant to this factor also are ignorance of the masses; lack of voter/ civic education which compound the problem.
- The sixth reason adduced by the respondents is weak democratic institutions as Political parties, Electoral Management Body and the Judiciary. The political parties should be organized and mobilized around a political ideology, but because this is lacking, other negative tools mobilization particularly forces of identity such as ethnicity and religion become appealing. Lack of party discipline is also witnessed in intra party activities where conduct of party primaries is hijacked by electoral fraud. With respect to the Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs), the respondents aver that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) hoard voters cards of registered voters and sell them to incumbent office holders to perpetrate themselves in power.

One particular respondent testified that some political party agents approached him while on INEC ad-hoc duty during the 2019 election, with many voters' cards (one wonders where they got the cards from), and asked for his assistance to enable them utilize the cards. He declined and tried to educate them on how impossible it is because of the electronic nature of the PVC. He said he felt terribly disappointed with INEC, and expressed his doubts over INEC's credibility, impartiality, independence, effectiveness and efficiency.

- The seventh factor for sale of voter card is the problem of electoral justice, being that once the declared winner of the contested election is sworn in, with full paraphernalia of office, it tilts the electoral justice landscape in favour of the winner. It is with this realization that voter card trading is practiced. Also, corruption in the judiciary is another factor as there are allegations of grafts against some judges. Despite, several electoral fraud that characterize most elections, most petitions were hardly successful. This is due to the impossibility to prove that the fraud was substantial to alter the results.

Some respondents also reasoned that ineffective law enforcement aided this practice. Complacency and complicity of security agents and election officials add to the problem. In order to seal their protection and loyalty, security agents are usually the first to be compromised by the political parties or candidates. Hence vote trading often takes place in the presence of security agents who appear unable or unwilling or too compromised to deter such electoral offences. There is also the related problem of the weakness of the rule of law. The fact that those who engage in the act are never arrested and prosecuted encourages many others to adopt the strategy.

Going by the provision of the Electoral Act 2006, section 130 criminalizes any act of electoral fraud but a lack of political will by the political class coupled with inability of other law enforcement bodies to compel obedience, this impunity persist.

The respondents identified that the pre and post political conflicts in Taraba State were as a result of enemy images constructed by supporters of politicians on different sides of the political divide. This they all agree stem from social division based on ethnic, religious factors as seen by the preference of one ethnic group, and those professing particular religion for either PDP or, APC.

It was also agreed by all the respondents that political supporters marshalled out plans on gaining the most advantage against opponents. This is supported by the intimidation, harassment, and destruction of billboards and vehicles that ensued during the campaign visits of both President Buhari and former Vice President to the State. The respondents also cited the attack on the APC gubernatorial candidate Alhaji Sani Danladi and his convey where a number of his supporters died, with many vehicles destroyed. The APC had blamed the attack on PDP government.

All the respondents maintained that violence erupted at various parts of Jalingo: Aungwa Kasa, Main Market, Water Board, ATC, Nukkai, extending up to Mutum Bui and other environs of the state as election results were rejected following allegations and counter allegations of electoral fraud and irregularities in the electoral process.

News media reports (Channels TV, Vanguard 2019, Punch 2019) claimed that 8 lives were lost with 56 others admitted at the Federal Medical Centre Jalingo and many properties destroyed in the post-election violence in the state.

In the case that political conflicts occasioned by sale of voter cards are a recurrent decimal in Taraba State, much need to be done by the government in ensuring electoral governance that require impartiality, independence, efficiency, professionalism, and transparency of the EMBs to avoid mutual suspicion and mistrust among political actors, in order to achieve sustainable peace and development.

Election Management, Voter card trading and political conflicts in Taraba State

Election is the process in which representatives of the people enter into public offices to function on behalf of, and for the benefit of the people. Elections serve two purposes in a

democracy, it gives voters the freedom of choice to elect preferred candidates for an office and secondly, candidates are availed the opportunity to canvass for the votes of the eligible voters in a free and fair contest.

Electoral management is the process of arriving at free and fair selection of candidates to fill public positions. Such activity necessarily should involve well-coordinated actions by men and women aimed at achieving the goal of peaceful and orderly elections in a political system. Consequently, the overall goal of setting up an electoral body is to ensure a viable electoral system and a hitch free electoral management (Ita & Atai 2018).

The primary responsibility for election management in Nigeria resides in an electoral body. This body has the responsibility for constituency delimitation, registration of voters, registration of political parties, organization of elections, and the declaration of election results. Over the years, the autonomy and capacity of this body has been suspect. This is reflected in its endless renaming and restructuring by successive governments. General Abdusallami Abubakar renamed it the Independent National Electoral commission (INEC). The problem of legitimacy and credibility are embedded in this institutional history. INEC was established by Decree No. 17, 1998 and the amendment Decree No. 33, 1998 (Agbaje & Adejumobi 2006). Like its predecessors INEC has not been able to engender public confidence in the electoral process or organise transparent and credible elections.

The autonomy of the electoral commission and its efficacy are fall under several factors. Notably is the composition and mode of appointment of the electoral body. How are its members selected, what should be its numerical strength, the tenure of members, and under what circumstances can they be removed from office and how? Second is the legal framework of its powers. How is its autonomy guaranteed concretely in the constitution? How is the electoral commission funded? To whom is the commission answerable? And with what freedom does it conduct its activities like voter registration, and the actual voting processes? The composition of Nigeria's electoral body is at the behest of the president. The commission is just one of the executive organs of the state albeit recognized by the constitution as independent. The federal electoral commissioners have tenure of office, but they do not have security of tenure. They can be removed by the president without any prima facie case of misconduct made against them. For instance, under the Babangida regime, two successive electoral commission chairmen (Professors Eme Awa and Humphrey Nwosu) were removed from office in 1989 and 1993 respectively in questionable circumstances– the former for his uncompromising stance in the management of the electoral commission, and the latter following the military government's decision to annul the 12 June presidential elections contrary to the position of the electoral commission. The funding of the electoral commission is the prerogative of the executive, which determines how much it is provided for it in the national budget. Finance is a major means through which the autonomy of the electoral commission is compromised. The funding of the electoral commission assumes a seasonal affair; planning for elections is therefore not a systematic and continuous process. The exigencies of electoral politics determine its funding needs.

The electoral process includes voter registration, political campaigns, voting, the declaration of election results, and post-election petitions and complaints. It also includes the electoral

laws itself. Many of these processes have been very controversial. Voter registration is a crucial phase in the electoral process which political parties view as a first step in positioning themselves to win elections. Consequently, they go all out to mobilize their cadres for the exercise. Indeed, the manipulation of the voter registration process either through multiple registrations, registration of underage persons, and denial of registration to opposition or inflating the voters' register constitute a major step in election rigging. In Nigeria voter registration exercises have often been utterly flawed. Some setbacks of 'voter registration' that affect overall enfranchisement and loss of confidence in the electoral process include logistical delays, insufficient staff training, the lack of security at registration centres, and poor voter education campaigns and other flaws. Other forms of malpractices include hoarding of registration forms and cards with the aim of selling them to politicians and creating artificial scarcity of registration materials. It is therefore obvious that voter registration exercise is a prelude to the grand electoral fraud which characterizes elections in Nigeria.

There are other factors that impinge on the electoral process as, the institution of political parties in Nigeria which from historical times, have been ethicized, with the major parties having strong ethnic support. The nature of political parties in Nigeria is captured by Lewis thus:

The nebulous party system has little to do with any distinct ideologies, strategies, or sectional appeals... Ethnicity is still a crucial vehicle for political mobilization... (Lewis 2003).

Another factor is political barons, clients. This is not a new phenomenon in Nigeria's electoral process (Agbaje & Adejumobi 2006, Lucky 2014). Historically, Nigeria's political party formations have been characterized by mobilization-able leaders, who as founder-leaders, exercise tremendous influence. These powerful individuals sponsor aspiring election candidates, because of the huge cost of electioneering. The immediate of a monetized electoral politics is the emergence of 'political barons' who invest in election candidates for higher financial and political returns. The logic of the market is reproduced in the political sphere: there is a political market, and there are investors, sellers and consumers or buyers interacting to make the market functional. In Nigerian parlance, the political barons are 'political godfathers', who deploy a vast array of resources –to support their preferred candidates. In this context, the stage is set for flawed elections, where election results are viewed with suspicion by the populace. In such situations, groups who feel cheated and abandoned by the electoral process will resort to political violence. All this gave rise to the political violence witnessed pre, during, and post the 2019 election in Nigeria in general, and particularly Taraba State leading to killings, maiming, destruction and political unrest with consequent imposition of curfew in Taraba State.

Conclusion

The Nigerian society is a reflection of its economic and socio-political development; shaped by ethno-cultural and religious cleavages, which have served the political class for as long as the civic society has remained bound to primordial sentiments. The unfortunate outcome being that the electorate continues to trade their weapon of change in governance (voter card) for peanuts, and resort to violence when they perceive that their group parochial interest is

not met, as against national interest which will serve the purpose of integration of all citizens. This is the sense in which it is concluded among the several reasons /rationale enunciated for voter card trading in Taraba State that, a major reason for this recalcitrant practice is the selfish interest of the political class. Most of these reasons whether structural or institutional exist because of the desperate efforts of politicians who engage in the ignoble act to in order for them to achieve their inordinate ambitions for power and materialism. They are linked to the high stakes placed on politics in the country with devastating effects for the democratic project.

Recommendations

The following are germane for this work:

The government should act fast, and work assiduously to develop the economy, particularly with respect to income and poverty levels as many people are living in poverty. This is a factor that tends to make people easily susceptible to diverse forms of negative mobilization at the slightest inducement, including electoral fraud.

The electoral body INEC should be above board as it perform functions statutorily assigned to her as this will gain recognition for Nigeria in the comity of nations, and election results will be respected by the populace, eschewing the need for undemocratic forms of protests post elections;

INEC should build the trust and confidence in the electoral process to grow voter participation; where there is voter apathy, there will be poor governance and lack of development;

It is necessary to build synergy with all bodies necessary and concern with elections and electoral outcome: the media, democratic institutions, security, civil societies, non-governmental organizations, targeted populations i.e. women, youths etc;

There should be need for continuous civic and voter education such that both the federal and state governments share the responsibilities on this.

Political offices in Nigeria should be made less attractive to dissuade politicians from staking all that it worth to get into such offices.

The government and all law enforcement agencies should exercise political will in prosecuting political offenders to serve as deterrent and secure the integrity of our electoral process.

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