
CREDIBLE ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA: PANACEA FOR STABILITY, GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Credible election is sacrosanct for the realization of all the index of development. There cannot be enduring stability and growth in any nation with election process that is clean, acceptable and credible. Therefore, election without integrity is farce and Nigeria in particular cannot grow with election rigging. Hence, this paper utilizing the secondary data studied credible elections in Nigeria as a panacea for stability, growth and development. The study found that credible elections serve as checks on the excesses of government in their policies and programmes, give the electorates voice in the running of the affairs of their country and promotes peace and stability as the winners represent the wishes of the voters. The paper also found out that elections in Nigeria are militated by forces ranging from poor/weak electoral laws, ignorant voters, weak institutions of the states particularly the Independent Electoral Commission and the security agencies among others. To achieve credible election, the study recommended among others that the 2018 Electoral Act as passed by the National Assembly be signed into law and obeyed, Electoral College system be adopted for gubernatorial and presidential elections.

Keywords: Credible election, Nigeria, stability and development

INTRODUCTION

Historically, modern-day African nations are creations of British, French and Portuguese colonization. Colonialism merged geographically and ethnically different people together for administrative and economic convenience but failed to unite them (Onah and Ayogu, 2018). The process of colonial amalgamation only joined diverse people and regions in an artificial political entity. Consequently, there has been ethno-politically propelled violence in Kenya, Zimbabwe, Sudan, Mali and Nigeria to mention

but a few. These violence have continued to claim lives and property as well as make life very insecure in these nations.

In particular, Nigeria is made up of three major ethnic groups of Hausa/Fulani, Igbo, Yoruba among other numerous minorities. The contraption of these ethnically, religiously and ideologically diverse people has created a challenge of stability, oneness and nationhood. Therefore, Nigerians maintain two separate identities; one, his civic republican community (ethnic group) and two, the modern nation-state (Nigeria). Hence, Sir Abubakar Tafawa-Balewa was quoted to have stated in 1948 that “since 1914, the British Government has been trying to make Nigeria into one country, but the Nigerian people themselves are historically different in their backgrounds, in their religious beliefs and customs and do not show themselves any willingness to unite.... Nigerian unity is only a British intention for the country”.

Another frontline nationalist, Chief Obafemi Awolowo (1947) equally asserted that “Nigeria is not a nation; it is a mere geographical expression. There are no “Nigerians” in the same sense as there are “English” or “Welsh” or “French”. The word Nigeria is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not”.

Consequently, whatever a Nigerian’s relationship with the state is, the benefits/interests of his people (tribe/religion) come first, then the nation-state as a whole. This weakens the spirit of patriotism, endangers stability of the country at the slightest provocation with adverse effects on lives and property.

In reaction to this menace, governments both military and civilian have come up with policies and programmes to eschew divisions and mistrust among the ethnic nationalities that make up Nigeria with its attendant stability issues. There was the National Youth Service Corps scheme (NYSC), the National Orientation Agency (NOA) to re-orientate Nigerians, rotation of positions among states (federal character principle and quota system) among others; all to promote unity in diversity.

However, the stability challenge facing the country instead of retarding takes more deadly dimensions. With return of democracy after years of military incursions in our body politics, politically motivated violence more than ever threatens the very foundation of the country’s unity. Electoral processes since 1999 for instance have led to instability, distrust and fear in Nigeria and among Nigerians. With the frequent electoral problems in the country, investors are reportedly pulling out of the country into other smaller African countries for fear of possible break down of law and order. Consequently, unemployment, poverty, ignorance, decaying infrastructure etc have continued to make Nigeria the mock of others in the comity of nations.

Therefore, with democracy being the dominant system of government in our contemporary time and elections cardinal decimal of democratic process, how can the management of elections bring about stability, growth and development in Nigeria? This is the concern of this lecture, “Credible elections in Nigeria: Panacea for stability, growth and development”. The lecture would discuss this topic under the following thematic headings: Elections in Nigeria, credible elections, importance of credible elections, challenges of credible elections and measures to promote credible elections in Nigeria.

II. ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

Elections are means of selecting/choosing those to represent the people in different public positions within a polity. Election provides citizens with opportunity to influence policy making (Azutoru, 2011). It could also be a ratificatory process aimed at giving a sitting government some appearances of popularity and mobilize the people for popular participation in development.

Between 1959 and 2019, governments in Nigeria have conducted 11 national elections with enormous costs on the people. The federal government spent the sum of #450billion to enable the Independence National Electoral Commission (INEC) conduct the elections between 1999 and 2019. This excluded grants from development partners in both cash and logistics. Particularly, the 2011 elections cost government #112.9billion, 2015 took the sum of #108.8billion and 2019 engulfed a whopping sum of #242billion (*Daily Sun*, 19/2/19). The Nigerian citizens continue to bear these costs at the expense of quality education, healthcare and security.

On a different note, the people/economy loses hugely during elections. As the *Daily Trust* Newspaper under its title on 18th February, 2019 “Counting cost of 2019 elections: Economy to lose #1.6trillion”. The people and businesses/government lose man-hours through work free days/closing of market and work places to register as voters, collect the voters’ cards, standing under the sun and in the rain to vote and so on. Some have to travel long distances to perform their civic duties with the attendant risks on the Nigerian roads.

Others have been killed in election violence as well as stampedes during political campaigns. The *Punch* of 26th February, 2019 writing under the heading “2019 elections: Watered by blood of Nigerians” reported that 40 persons were killed in the 2019 Presidential and National Assembly Elections. The Human Right Watch, 16th May, 2011 equally recorded that about 800 people lost their lives in post election violence.

However, Nigerians cannot boast of commensurate benefits from these elections they sacrifice so much to sustain. It is common for the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) to inform Nigerians of “wasted” 16 years of the Peoples’ Democratic Party (PDP). Even about 4 years into the APC government, Nigeria still earns the notoriety of the world’s poverty capital (*Tribune* 21st February, 2019). Some prominent Nigerians have come out to allege that the country has not been this insecure and divided since independence. This means that even the present government is not free from its accusations against the past administrations.

This is because in Nigeria, elections have always been hotly contested under party politics that is intemperate and violence writ-large. Access to the state and its resource-allocating powers is viewed as the means of guaranteeing one’s economic security. Hence, more often than not, the elite have failed to play by the rules of competitive electoral politics which priorities politics of tolerance, conflict and consensus, bargaining and compromise. They see elections as warfare characterized by gangsterism and political disorder. Political parties which compete in elections are also like armband of men and women going to war where there must be victors and vanquished. Here, elections become warfare where it is a sin to lose. This dominant pattern of elections and electioneering is a threat to the stability of the nation and puts its tenuous peace at great risks (Ighodalo, 2017).

The political unrest and spate of insecurity which have invaded parts of the northern geo-political zone have their links to disputed elections in 2011 (Uwaifo, 2012). Several studies suggest that voting behavior in Nigeria is predominantly influenced by some form of identity factor such as ethnicity, family lineages, religion and other sundry factors. Virtually, every average Nigerian is primarily an identity voter or candidate.

In essence, voting in Nigeria is in many cases nothing more than an ethnic census (Adekunle and Masajuwa, 2016). An individual voter uses ethnicity as the proxy for the expected benefits for voting a particular candidate/party. Simply, voting is considered to be largely dependent on primordial forms of

identification. Political parties themselves tend to be dominated by ethnic power forces rather than being built on ideological persuasion. Hence, Nigerians are members of two types of political communities in the same temporal and spatial world.

On the other hand, they are members of their civic republican communities which are often their ethnic or community groups (or even religions) which they owe some obligations. At the same time, they are members of the modern national state. Voters' reflection on this dual citizenship orientation undermines the democratization process as Nigerians continue to show greater allegiance to their civic republican community (Adekunle and Masajuwa, 2016).

The electoral process in Nigeria since independence has gained an unenviable notoriety for fraudulent practices. This has forced many to see elections in Nigeria as a mirage or a mere selection. Selection in the sense that the electorate are left out of the entire systems owing to the fact that elections are conducted with or without the full participation of the electorate who are supposed to choose those who rule over them. These elections are characterized by serious and blatant cases of electoral fraud such as stuffing of ballot boxes, over-bloated voters' registers, special treatment of voters and election officials, disappearance or destruction of ballot boxes, distortion of results (vote padding), grandstanding of political sponsors (godfatherism), intimidation of voters and political opponents by law enforcement agents and thugs as well as election related violence, arson and killing. There is a near general consensus that the integrity of election has been on a steady decline since 1959 (Adeyemo, 2009; Adekunle and Masajuwa, 2016).

Elections results in Nigeria have been contested in courts and greeted with protests. This is because the process that produced them was hardly credible, transparent, free and fair. This marks the focus of the next sub-head.

III. ELECTIONS CONSIDERED CREDIBLE

Credible election is always used interchangeably with clean, acceptable, free and fair elections. These are elections conducted in accordance with the existing electoral rules and in which every contestant is given equal opportunity to win. It is an election conducted without partiality or undue advantages of any party or candidate (Asadu, 2017). Credible election is election conducted in a democratically acceptable manner/process. It must provide for equal electorate and freedom which afford them opportunity to make real and meaningful choice devoid of coercion or intimidation (Eminue, 2001). In effect, election would be deemed to be credible, and hence good if it is free and fair and not based on patronage of any kind. Other specific factors sine qua non for credible elections are discussed hereunder.

a. Adequate security

Adequate security to guard electoral materials, electoral officers and voters is provided in a free and fair election to prevent irregularities that may arise as a result of security lapses. Security enables the voters and official to perform their roles without fear or intimidation. However, provision of security should not be mistaken for militarization of elections; where the party in power deploy the military and police with overt and covert gestures to favour their interests. Security in elections is provided to secure the process not to seize the process.

b. Independent judiciary

There is in existence independent judiciary to settle electoral disputes. That is disputes arising from allegation of electoral malpractices.

c. Electoral laws

For credible elections, there are laws that guide the conduct of the electorate, political parties and electoral officials. These rules are updated and religiously applied. These laws are not made with anybody or interest in mind either for or against.

d. Independent electoral management body

There is an impartial electoral body that conducts elections in line with the existing electoral laws. Members of the electoral management body are non-partisan. According to John MakumMbaku of the Brookings Institution's Africa Growth Initiative, a U.S-based think-tank, a credible electoral management body should be granted five things: decisional independence to decide freely, institutional independence to perform its functions without undue interference from the government, adequate resources, a system of accountability, and a procedure civil society can use to file complaints against members of the electoral body for illegal or unethical conduct.

e. Reliable voters' registers

Voters are registered for election and their names displayed for voters to cross-check their names. The register is periodically reviewed to enable new registration of qualified voters and possibly cleanse the register of deceased voters. For it to be reliable, it should not be inundated with under-aged or ghost voters just to bloat the register for sinister purposes during elections.

f. Transparent voting and counting: For credible elections, the voting system is open and votes are counted immediately after voting in the presence of political party agents, electoral observers, security officials and electorate. The result is announced immediately after counting of votes. Man-made distortions and postponements in the collation (centres) process create skepticism and are antithetical to transparency required for credible elections.

4. SIGNIFICANCE OF CREDIBLE ELECTIONS

ArseneBado, a political scientist and an associate researcher at the Centre de Recherche et d' Action Pour la Paix in Abidjan, Cote d' Ivoire rightly observed that elections are about power. They designate who will control power and lead the community. He maintained that an election may be the perfect trigger for conflict and political violence if not well-managed.

Credible elections especially in developing countries tend to improve economic policy by disciplining governments (Collier and Chauvet, 2009). As contested elections have become more common, economic policy and governance in emerging economies have improved markedly. These improvements accord with the notion that elections discipline governments into improving economic policy and governance. This is the structural effect of elections; they increase accountability.

Faced with an election, a government may need to attract votes by adopting policies that are good for the citizens, or at least good for the median voters. In addition, once a sitting government knows that it can be voted out of power within the framework of periodic elections, it strives to pursue the socio-economic and political interests of the electorate who may switch allegiance to opposition parties if such government fails to meet their expectations.

Election is part of the democratic framework in the society that if properly put to use, will produce socio-economic and political development. Credible elections put the right people in government, manage conflict effectively and allocate resources efficiently. In the same way, credible elections are necessary for socio-economic renewal and to stem the tide of political decay in the country. This is

because in the view of apologists of liberal democracy, once elections are gotten right, democracy is on its way to being consolidated and in consequence enduring peace and security will be instituted in the state. In essence, credible elections produce security, development and political stability.

Furthermore, credible elections are indispensable to the establishment and maintenance of democracy. This is because elections, inter-alia, provide legitimation for the state and its custodians. In developed liberal and social democracies such as the United States and many European states, elections have been institutionalized as the *dues ex machina* for fostering competitive party politics, taking stock of the performance of leaders at various levels of the polity and ensuring the smooth and orderly transfer of the reins of power. Elections are the lifeblood of modern democracy and the frequency, fairness and openness of such process are crucial to the stability of the polity. The extent to which election advances democratic order depends in large part on the existing electoral system, its nature and acceptance by the stakeholders in the electoral process.

Very importantly, a government that is genuinely instituted and constituted by popular mandate enjoys a lot of support and legitimacy because its laws are easily obeyed by the citizens who see public office holders as their representatives freely chosen by them. Conversely, an administration that was established through a fraudulent and violent electoral process usually lacks such vital ingredient of democracy. Governments that are instituted through questionable electoral processes in a bid to strengthen their stranglehold on power tend to be high-handed and repressive in nature. This in a considerable way explains why most African states are gross abusers of human rights and why they cannot tolerate dissenting positions and groups (Paki and Inokoba, 2006).

5. CHALLENGES OF CREDIBLE ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

Examining the electoral history of Nigeria indicates that the integrity of election has been on a steady decline. In most cases, each new election conducted turns out to be worse than the preceding one. Hence, Dr Chukwuemeka Ezife, a former Governor of Anambra State was quoted to have opined that the 1999 elections were disputed but it was vastly better than 2003 elections. People shouted foul about the 2003 elections but that was infinitely better than what he described as the non-elections of 2007. The experiences of the 2011, 2015 and the recent 2019 elections cannot be anything different.

Therefore, what is wrong with the electoral processes in Nigeria? Some of them are discussed hereunder.

i. **Lack of institutional and financial autonomy of the electoral management body (Independent National Electoral Commission)**

All the principal officers of INEC, including its chairman, national electoral commissioners, and the resident electoral commissioners; are as constitutionally mandated, the political appointees of the President (Adekunle and Masajuwa, 2016). Consequently, INEC had to rely on the executive arm, particularly the presidency, for its actions and inactions. The loyalty and accountability of INEC, therefore, is first and foremost to the executive to whom it has to go cap in hand begging for audience and funding. And as the saying goes, he who pays the piper dictates his tunes; the commission remains the puppet of the presidency or its annex.

ii. **Monetization of politics**

Moreover, there is an unprecedented monetization of politics as “moneybags” hijack the electoral process. The situation is deteriorated because of INEC’s inability to enforce political finance regulations.

For instance on the eve of the 23rd March, 2019 gubernatorial elections in Lagos State, two bullion vans were said to be sighted in a private residence. Some raised their voices against it but the INEC and security agencies could not do much.

The political elites have “weaponized” poverty for political gains. Because of poverty and ignorance, electorates mount pressures on candidates and parties for material benefits; thereby making contest of elections in Nigeria an extra-ordinarily capital intensive venture and losing elections seems like a bitter personal tragedy.

Political parties on their own do not help matters as candidates must vie under party platforms. They seize the opportunity to charge shylock nomination fees as high as #45million to contest in the party. In 2015, PDP charged its aspirants #22million for presidential elections while the APC charged #27.5million. As if that was not enough, in the just concluded 2019 elections, the APC raised the charges to a whopping #45million for presidential nomination and #22.5 million for governorship slots (*Vanguard*, 5th Sept; 2018). The PDP charged a nomination fees of #12million for presidential and #6million for governorship positions. The “not-too-young to run” mantra is difficult with the above money politics.

There is also the issue of bogus salaries collected by political office holders while the civil servants starve. According to the *Premium Times* of 7th March, 2018, senators receive #750,000 as basic salaries and allowances amounting to #13.5million monthly. This gives a total of #14.5million take home monthly. The positions are made so juicy that average persons would want to go there or remain there at all cost.

iii. Mindless militarization of elections

In elections held recently, there was alleged unnecessary militarization of the process via massive deployment of security forces. This militarization of voting has not only undermined voters’ turnout but also provided cover for INEC to rig elections in favour of the ruling party (Ajayi, 2006) as both institutions are extensions of the presidency/government. The most recent of the militarization of voting apart from heavy presence of uniform and deadly armed security forces was an executive fiat issued by President Mohammed Buhari to “shoot at sight” during the just concluded 2019 elections (*Tribune* 20th February, 2019). Within days, a confidant of the president and the Governor of Kaduna State, Mallam El-Rufai came up with his “body-bag” comments considered largely as threats on external election observers (*Punch* 6th February, 2019). These no doubt raised tension and made the process scary. This is not in any way to deny the importance of adequate unbiased security in electoral process.

iv. Divided nature of the Nigerian state

As we stated earlier, voting pattern in Africa and particularly Nigeria is predominantly influenced by some form of identity factor such as ethnicity, family lineages, religion and other sundry factors. Poor management of diversity has become a major source of unhealthy competition, conflict and instability. Moreover, even as elections are promoted as instruments of resolving differences emanating from the diversity of identities and interests, in Nigeria regular polls have turned into triggers of violent conflicts. The Igbo apex cultural organizations in the run up to the 2019 General Elections through its National President, Chief John NniaNwodo announced the adoption of the candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), AlhajiAtikuAbubakar (*The Nation* 25th January, 2019). This singular act made greatest number of Igbo in various states in Nigeria favoured the said candidate.

Consequently, in Lagos State, the areas dominated by the Igbo people were reportedly invaded by thugs to prevent them from voting and burnt their ballot papers where voting took place. Similarly, we can recall that in 2015, the Oba of Lagos, Oba Akiolu was quoted to have threatened to waste the Igbo people in Lagos in the Lagoon should they use their votes to sway the wishes of Yoruba people (*Premium Times* 6th April, 2015). The 2015 Presidential election was largely skewed to ethnicity and religion as most Christians and the people of the old Eastern region voted for former President Jonathan while the Muslims and the core northerners (Hausa/Fulanis) massively voted for the APC candidate, MohammaduBuhari. The problem of poor management of diversity is accentuated by new bouts of extremism and populism now surging across the world and widespread disregard for rule of law. This mix has made diversity the greatest pitfall and the bane of African democracies. It has also led to the decline in civic citizenship and the preponderant rise of sectarian mobilization, violence and intimidation (Maendeleo Policy Forum, 6th Edition).

v. Sit-tight syndrome of incumbents

Despite the progress being made as elections as rituals hold periodically, democratization of electoral process remains farce in Nigeria. The democratic experiment is fragile and susceptible to instability and violent conflict. In several countries, presidents faced with constitutional term limits have refused to leave power gracefully, opting to change their national constitutions to extend their stay in office.

In recent times, Burkina Faso, Rwanda, Burundi, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo have amended their laws, appealed to the judiciary or refused to call for elections. In Nigeria, the aborted Third Term Agenda of the former President Olusegun Obasanjo is still handy in the minds of Nigerians (*Sahara Reporters* 16th February, 2006). Even in the penultimate 2018, President MohammaduBuhari vetoed the Electoral amendment bill passed by the National Assembly to improve the 2019 elections. The president maintained that while the provisions of the bill are good for credible elections, he would withdraw his assent because of the timing of the bill. Except according to him, there is an express clause that the new law would not take effect in the 2019 elections. This according to many was to ensure that he comes back to power via the election.

In the same manner, presidents in Nigeria have changed the headship of key security agencies to make sure the elections favour them. There was also the issue of manipulating the appointment or sack of officials of INEC to field their cronies for political patronage. The power of incumbency also enables the party in power to have substantial and unhindered access to state machineries including the treasury, mass media, electoral umpire and security forces as we observed above.

As party in power, ruling party also enjoys good patronage from wealthy individuals and corporate bodies in terms of financial donations in exchange for the protection of their business interests. On a particular note, former President Obasanjo in a bid to utilize his power of incumbency to deliver victory for his party, PDP, in 2007 General Election condescendingly declared that, for him and the PDP, the 2007 election was “a do or die affairs” (<https://allafrica.com/.../200702110015.ht...>)

vi. Voters’ Register/Registration Abuse

A review of voters’ registration exercises INEC conducted has been fraudulent with irregularities, particularly non-registration of eligible voters and withholding and sale of voters’ card (Omotola, 2004). In Nigeria, voters’ registration exercise is the first victim in the rape of democratic process.

In most places, politicians charter people from various locations to register in their areas of interest for a pay. This they do to boost the number of registered voters in their areas. Others resort to under-age registration. While the acceptable age of registration and voting in elections in the country is 18 years, the politicians with INEC staff as accomplice allegedly register under-aged people.

The observation is justified when one considers the discrepancies in the number of accredited and registered voters in the just concluded 2019 elections. States that boasted of having 5million and 6million voters could only accredit less than 2million as the rest in the voters' register could be under-aged people or ghost voters. In Kano, Lagos and Rivers States, a total of 5,457,747; 6,570,291 and 3,215,273 voters registered respectively (Premium Times, 4th January, 2019). However, only 2,006,410; 1,196,490 and 678,167 respectively were accredited for the Presidential and National Assembly elections those states (*Vanguard* 27th February, 2019).

In addition, voters' registers are not cleansed adequately during voters' registration. Some voters who have died years back still have their names occupying the registers for dubious use by the politicians. In utilizing the lapses in the voters' register/registration, INEC in 2007 recorded a "miraculous" 100 percent turnout of voters in Rivers State during the presidential elections. Also in the supplementary gubernatorial election in Kano State recently, the same miracle played out. In both cases, it beats reasonable imaginations to have an election where everyone in the register turned up for voting; no dead people, zero apathy! Not even in the most developed democracies not to think of Nigeria.

vii. Manipulation of collation centers/results

This is yet another avenue of subverting the wishes of the voters. Politicians, especially, those of the ruling party would ensure that voting at polling units is free of violence and near-no-snatching of ballot boxes to deceive the gullible public. However, at the collation centers, votes for candidates are allegedly padded to edge out the original winners. Reflecting on the conduct of the 2003, 2007 and 2011 elections in Nigeria, Oromareghake (2013) observed that though the 2011 election was more transparent as it generally reflected the votes openly cast, counted and recorded in the various polling booths, but many of the complaints centered round what transpired at the collation centers where the voters appeared to have been shut out from "defending" their votes as much as they did at the polling units.

The collation of the just concluded 2019 elections was not any better. The 23rd February, 2019 elections were characterized with alleged padding of figures at collations; gifts of money to bribe the police and INEC officers in both Kano and Rivers States. After collation, one Professor Ibeawuchi, a returning officer in one of the Imo State Senatorial Districts was allegedly kidnapped and made to declare results under duress against the actual votes at polling units (*Daily Sun*, 26th February, 2019).

Some security agents were also said to be seen aiding the manipulations at the collation centers as they suffer opposition party agents with threats and intimidations. One Dr Ferry Gberegbe, Medical Doctor and a PhD holder was shot in Khana collation center in Rivers State by an officer of the Nigerian army supposedly working for a particular party (*Vanguard*, 17th March, 2019). He died later in a hospital. The collation centers have literally become political kitchen for cooking votes for and against parties as well as candidates.

Other challenges militating against credible elections in the Nigerian electoral process include: weak and poorly informed voters, rigging, stuffing of ballot boxes, vote trading, late arrival of election materials, shortage of voting materials either real or orchestrated to frustrate parties and candidates, insufficient officials, intimidation of voters among others.

6. WAYS TO PROMOTE CREDIBLE ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

Elections should not signify periods of divisions, pain, suffering, fear and anger, but in most of African countries, elections are perilous times characterized by violence and disruption (United States Institute for Peace, Preventing Electoral Violence in Africa, 2017). To make elections cleaner, transparent and credible in Nigeria, the following suggestions are put forward.

1. Enthroning a new political culture of tolerance

Politicians should learn to play by the rule of the game of politics rather than make it a “do or die” affair. A new political culture of tolerance and accommodation, bargaining and compromise, conflict and consensus should be embraced by the stakeholders in the political system (Ighodalo, 2017). The practice of destroying the system every time politicians fail to achieve their goals is not healthy for the future of democracy and the corporate existence (stability) of the country. Once the country is able to get its politics right, the economy will certainly be on its way to recovery and growth. The much needed peace for development will evolve as investors (both foreign and indigenous) will begin to develop confidence in the system.

2. Demonetization of politics in Nigeria

The control of the state apparatus should be deemphasized as a means of resource accumulation. Politics should not be taken as career but a vocation. Most Nigerian politicians are suffering from adult unemployment as most of them have nothing visible to fall on after their tenures. They are literally off life out of office; hence they loot mindlessly to secure their uncertain future after leaving office. One way of achieving this goal is for politicians to seek for alternative means of survival particularly in civil society and being judicious in spending money acquired while in office as nothing lasts forever.

Most importantly, the political offices should be made less attractive money-wise. The kind of money spent in running the presidency and the National Assembly can make any mortal covet such offices at all cost especially others who use same market demonstrating for #30,000 minimum wage.

The demonetization has also to be replicated in the political parties. The cost of their nomination forms has to be made affordable to open up the space for the “not-so-rich” individuals with integrity and genuine desire to serve. The “not-too-young” to run mantra is senseless in a highly monetized cash and carry electoral process.

3. Enthronement of independent and fearless judiciary

The judiciary is a critical organ in the sustenance of democracy and maintenance of law and order in the society. For the enthronement of credible elections in Nigeria, the judiciary should be reasonably seen to be the last hope of common man. The politicians that feel short-changed by their parties or the electoral bodies should have confidence in the judiciary to ventilate their grievances with hope of obtaining justice within a reasonable time.

In a situation where INEC that conducts elections is controlled largely by the president and the police, army and other security agencies which provide security are the employees of the presidency, the only option for an objective electoral process is the courts. The Nigerian judiciary has fairly fared well in this regard since 2005. To be able to perform creditably, the judiciary should be consistent and transparent in the discharge of its constitutional roles. It should be shielded from the rampaging scourge of corruption eating deep into the entire polity.

In this regard, government must be seen to emphasize merit in the appointment of judges. More importantly, the salaries and other benefits for judges should be enhanced to reasonably immune them from undue influences.

4. Building strong and independent electoral body

In Nigeria and Africa as a whole, perceptions of capacity and independence of electoral management bodies play a critical role in shaping notions of the credibility of election, their outcomes and acceptance of results. In the Nigerian case where the president appoints anyone he likes is not safe for credible elections. To guarantee the strength and independence of INEC in Nigeria, the appointment of the chairmanship of the body should not be from one person. It should be handed over to a body like the National Judicial Council and such a person to be appointed must not come from the same religious and ethnic backgrounds with the incumbent president.

The appointment from the academics is laudable but with recent outing of some university vice-chancellors in recent elections, retired justices of supreme courts with sufficient strength who distinguished themselves in their active services should be considered as well.

Another area is the financing of the body. The Presidency and National Assembly should ensure the electoral body has reasonably enough fund to operate. The fund should be released to them on time for prompt planning and procurement of necessary materials for the elections. For instance, government can start gradual release of funds to INEC for the 2023 elections in 2020.

5. Opening up the entire results collation process

As a way of managing high levels of mistrust, the commission should open the entire results collation process. Results should be announced at the polling stations and a copy of the results, signed by party agents, pasted at the polling station and electronically submitted to the national collation center (situation room).

Also, at the states' collation centers, results should be announced, verified by party agents who are also to be given copies of the results before submission. The results need to be beamed on a projector for all to see before transmitted electronically to the national collation centers. The media and party agents should be present at the national collation centre where presidential election results are to be received (Maendeleo Policy Forum, 6th Edition). All forms of intimidation and harassment of party agents, especially those from opposition by the military/security agencies should be discouraged.

6. Active participation of informed electorates in all elections

Active participation of the electorate is sacrosanct for any credible electoral process. This entails involvement of the people in every segment of the electoral process. They are involved actively in voters' registration, attend political rallies/campaigns, criticize government policies and programmes when necessary, engage and mobilize other in political protest/demonstrations against anti-people's actions and inactions of the government of the day. Such voters do not require force/inducement from any quarter before availing themselves the opportunity of participation. They know their expectations from the government and that election provide rare privilege to civilize the government and politicians.

However, active participation of uninformed or poorly informed electorate in electoral process is electoral suicide. This is because they engage in the process negatively. Some of them become fanatics, easy tools in the hand of politicians to wreck havoc to the entire process. This is the class of voters that

freely sell their votes to any available buyer at ridiculous price, engage in pre and post election violence at slightest provocation and commit ridiculous errors during voting, thereby wasting precious voting materials at the cost of the election management body among others.

7. Strengthening/amending/signing the electoral laws to accommodate

In Nigeria today, the very first step to getting elections right is to sign the Electoral Act of 2018 as passed by the National Assembly. Even the incumbent president was quoted to maintain that the provisions of the Act are good for our elections and democracy generally but his grouse with the law was its timing considering the proximity to the 2019 General Elections.

The anticipated amendment/signing of the Act will legitimate the use of technology, electronic transmission of results and online voting. These digitalized processes would become part of our laws such that anything contrary becomes aberration. This practice has the capacity to reduce the errors at collation centers, thuggery, economic sabotage of closing down businesses for the sake of elections as well as the spending on security on election days. This is because people will have the opportunity of utilizing ICT to vote and monitor the process in the comfort of the homes.

8. Adoption of electoral college system

This is a practice where a smaller group of people widely chosen by the people elect on behalf of the people their leaders in a general election. The smaller group so chosen serves as the people's representative for higher elections. The people so selected are the confidants of the people in their various communities/areas of representation. They are to be highly informed, influential and represent the views of their constituencies.

Adopting this system in Nigeria will reduce many of the vices that ruin our elections cost of conducting elections, the problems of ignorant voters and vote trading. The cost of planning election for over eighty-four (84) million voters is not small for a country with several infrastructural challenges. The number of voting materials will be drastically reduced as well as the expenditure involved in mobilizing high number of security personnel to man the crowd participating in elections. The issues of sudden shortage of election materials will be tackled as the election umpire will have lesser population to handle.

In the same manner, the problems of ignorant voters and vote trading will reduce. Since the members of the electoral college are not just ordinary people, they are most likely to avoid the errors leading to void votes and uphold the sanctity of election. They will not freely sell their votes in exchange for money. Such men and women are people of integrity and vote base on issues and ideologies of the people. It is important to add that in adopting this system, Option A-4 is to be utilized in electing members of the Electoral College while higher/actual elections by Electoral College are through secret open ballot system. This will checkmate the excess of some of the members of the Electoral College and make their mandate that of the majority of the people.

9. Arrest and prosecution of those suspected to have committed electoral offences

There is also the need to ensure that those that are suspected to have aided/committed electoral offences during elections are arrested and punished to serve as deterrence to others. The government has to set up election offences court as a special court for speedy trial of offenders.



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