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Sensitization of Secondary School Students towards Sustainable Electoral Process in Nigeria: Nigeria Independent Electoral Commission as a Focus

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Abstract

In the development process of any nation, voters' education occupies a key position in the scheme of things. It is the bedrock of every nation's economy and is an indispensable instrument for catching the young electorates for sustainable and democratic governance in the 21st century political and national development. The role of voter education in any electoral process cannot be underestimated. It is very crucial that voter education commences on time in order for election to be successful. Since the attainment of independence, electoral fraud has remained a knotty issue. The first three

attempts at democratic experiments were truncated on account of electoral fraud and poor election management. Also, the 1999 general elections that heralded the current democratic dispensation were reportedly characterized by widespread and monumental electoral malpractices, and irregularities. Since the enthronement of the current democratic order, there has not been enough emphasis on educating the Nigerian electorates on voters' education. Almost all the elections in this country, with exception of the immediate past one have been characterized by huge electoral violence, intimidation, manipulation of electoral commission and security agencies, election rigging, multiple voting, hijacking of ballot boxes, vote buying, accusation and counter accusation. The thrust of this paper therefore, is to investigate the strategies for implementing voter education by INEC on Nigerians and its implication for hitch-free political education and participation. This paper concludes that voters' education is very essential in any democratic system as proper orientation of the secondary school children on the essence of casting one's vote and involvement in democratic system of our country, will not only bring about high level of motivation, encouragement in the school children but will also make them have confidence in the government. This method will no doubt lead to a sustainable democratic system in our country, Nigeria.

Key words: INEC. Voters Education, Secondary Schools, Electoral Fraud, Democratic Election, Sustainable development

Introduction

Greater than anything else, the greatest obstacle to the nascent democracy is the pervasive state of ill-prepared of voters education and insecurity of lives and property, as evidenced by the spate of armed robbery attacks, assassinations of political opponents, ill-prepared of voters education towards the forthcoming elections in Nigeria, electoral fraud, coupled with the seeming helplessness of security agencies to handle criminal acts. The situation is worsened by the increasing number of unemployed Nigerians some of whom are ready recruits for criminal activities (*Nigerian Tribune*, 2002). The democratic experience in Nigeria in the last decade cannot be adjudged as positive when compared to Ghana when all the factors that ought to be available such as voters education are either not there or insignificant for sustainable political development in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general

The role of voter education in any developed and developing nation with electoral process cannot be underestimated. It is very important that voter education commences on time in order for election to be successful. Voter education is designed to ensure that voters are ready, willing, and able to participate in electoral process in any nation. This involves election literacy, educational campaign and confidence that the electoral process is appropriate and effective in selecting their representatives through the electoral process. It thus becomes imperative to state that voters have confidence in the electoral process when they are properly educated about the procedures.

Political philosophers have extolled popular voter education as the source of vitality and creative energy, as a means of defense against tyranny and as a means of enacting collective opinion. It has been contended that political order and stability are guaranteed through popular voter education aims to create a climate of knowledgeable political participation by all potential voters in an election (Akintayo, 2011). Furthermore, some political philosophers have held that it seeks to enable potential voters to cast their votes with confidence and achieve stipulated objectives, benefits the individual participants by giving them sense of value, dignity, self-worth and self-realization (Alapiki, 2004). These objectives may also be achieved through other avenues and the education campaign will want to establish address such issues as voter security, basic voting procedures, accessible voting stations, and lively but non violent political campaigns by candidates.

Voters' education and Political participation occurs in every polity, old or emerging, oligarchic or democratic. This is because in every polity, political decisions and appointments are made, upheld or rescinded. Notably, the nature and character of voters education and political participation is determined, influenced and shaped by the type of government in a polity. Popular political education and participation is limited by the nature and realities of governance (Iyoha, 1999). It has been posited that popular voters education and participation is an essential ingredient of democratic government, which is linked directly or tangentially, to other major features of democracy such as consent, encouragement of each target schools to initiate voters education activities, design schools as bridges to reach communities and carry out other activities that are targeting at democratic sustenance in Nigeria and also to encourage democratic processes in schools activities (Uhunmwangho and Urhohide, 2011). While under oligarchic regimes, political education and participation is restrictively the prerogative of the selected few, especially the aristocrats and their agents, under

democracy, these prerogatives are transformed as rights enjoyed by every person according to laid down rules and regulations (Alapiki, 2004:).

The problem

Very soon, precisely July 2012, most States in the Federation will be conducting their gubernatorial elections. Consequently, there is no enough efforts from Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) aimed at promoting voter education in the country. Voter education is essential to ensuring that voters can effectively and efficiently exercise their voting rights and express their political will through the electoral process (Akintayo, 2011). If voters are not prepared or motivated to participate in the electoral process, questions may begin to arise about the legitimacy, representativeness, and responsiveness of elected leaders and the electoral body i.e. INEC in this case. Without voter education, Nigerians may not be sensitized about the elections as well as reposing their confidence in the electoral system.

Voter education is a very focused and deliberate undertaking. It is targeted at eligible voters and addresses specific electoral events as well as the general electoral process. INEC should see it as laudable endeavour to properly educate and enlighten Nigerians about the elections. It is the responsibility of INEC to organize a campaign aimed at voters' education. Such enlightenment as "Who can vote from outside the country?, Are citizens residing outside the country allowed to participate in the election?, How do electors cast their votes?, Manually marking of ballots?, and what are the legal qualifications to become a candidate at legislative elections?. Nigerians needs to be educated assisted to participate and understand the electoral process and the above stated questions. The education campaign comes with desired messages through various media platforms to effectively and efficiently educate and mobilize Nigerians to participate in the forthcoming and subsequent elections. These efforts are aimed at avoiding higger and violent election. Hence it is better to catch them young through proper voters' education and n the secondary schools (Igini, 2012).

The issue of voter education becomes important the more with the resolve of the Nigeria President Goodluck Ebelle Jonathan to conduct a credible election in Nigeria. A substantial amount has duly been approved and payment made to INEC to conduct the election. The question now agitating the minds of every citizens of this nation is what is preventing INEC from embarking on voter education across the nooks and crannies of Nigeria? In

Nigeria where the larger percentage of voters fall within the age bracket of 18-40, there is the crucial need to educate these age brackets who are predominantly youths on proper conduct and acceptable behavior expected of them during the election. This is also linked with several violent activities during the election whereby youths are prone to unleash mayhem (Akintayo, 2011). It has therefore become pertinent for INEC to urgently address the issue of voter education. INEC has all the resources to embark on the campaign that will help Nigerians have access to basic information on their voting rights.

Since the attainment of independence, electoral fraud has remained a knotty issue. The first three attempts at democratic experiments were truncated on account of electoral fraud and poor election management. Also, the 1999 general elections that heralded the current democratic dispensation were reportedly characterized by widespread and monumental electoral malpractices, and irregularities. In particular, the seriousness of the electoral malpractices and irregularities that marred the presidential election resulted in the rejection of the election resulted by the opposition party's presidential candidate, Chief Olu Falae, and subsequently called for the establishment of Government of National Unity. The opposition party, the All Peoples Party (APP) later went to court to question the sanctity of the presidential election (Hohnert and Dirk, 2004).

Literature review

Voters' education and electoral conduct in democratic societies revolves around certain institutionalized process of determining popular choice in direct and popular representation in in-direct or representative democracies. Some of the institutionalized in view of Igwe (2002:131) include:

...an independent electoral body must be set up to supervise the exercise, political parties must be freely organized and the citizen must have the fundamental rights of freedom of speech and association, with provision for independent or non-party candidates.

With all these lofty arrangement, election is generally expected to be free, fair and just. Any negation, contradiction or at best, violation of any of the above well determined approach and arrangement for any election breeds electoral fraud and negates the tenets of democracy. Electoral fraud is therefore criminal. It encompasses all forms of electoral malpractices, irregularities and rigging, which have underlying criminal intents and

purposes. In the view of Michael Aloysius Okolie (2005); it connotes criminal and illegal electoral acts which unduly sway electoral victory to the desired particular usually the unpopular direction.

There are broad range of political activities that citizens engage in the bid to influence the political process. These are basically election and non-election related activities such as protest, riots, strikes, boycotts, arson and terrorism. Essentially, it is difficult to accept those non-elective activities to represent political participation within the contexts of this analysis. Election, campaign and voting are the widespread mode of political participation. Electoral related participation includes registration of political parties, party primaries, party funding, registration of voters, voters' education, electioneering, voting and contest for elective offices.

Many controversial issues with consequential painful experiences and centrifugal tendencies dominate the Nigerian federal polity. These issues centre on the various interests, cleavages, voters' education and diversity in the system. These constitute travails, unpleasant experiences that unsettle the Nigeria democracy (Uhunmwangho and Ekpu, 2012).

Concept of election

In a democracy, election is a fundamental ingredient and a litmus test of voters' education and political participation. Election has been defined as the process by which a people decide their rulers and assign persons to ruler-ship positions. Elections denote voluntary participation in the choice of leaders and therefore bequeath or invest legitimacy (Ikelegbe, 2004). The most common electoral systems can be categorized as either proportional or majoritarian. Among the former are party – list proportional representation and additional member system. Among the latter are first-past-the-post (relative majority), and absolute majority. Several countries have growing electoral reform movements, which advocate systems such as approval voting, single transferable vote, voters' education and/or instant run-off voting or a Condorcet method (Ikelegbe, 2004).

Democratic elections

Election is the central institution of democratic representative governments. This is because, in a democracy, the authority of the government derives solely from the consent of the governed. The principal mechanism for translating that consent into governmental authority is the holding of free and fair elections. Kirkpatrick (1980) identified the criteria of democratic election to include voters education and democratic elections amongst others.

Opposition parties and candidates must enjoy the freedom of speech, assembly, and movement necessary to voice their criticisms of the government openly and to bring alternative policies and candidates to the voters. Simply put, permitting the opposition access to the ballot is not enough. Elections in which the opposition is barred from the airwaves, has its rallies harassed or its newspapers censored are not democratic. The party in power may enjoy the advantages of incumbency, but the rules and conduct of the election contest must be fair and just (Ikelegbe, 2004).

Democratic elections are periodic. Democracies do not elect dictators or president-for-life. Elected officials are accountable to the people, and they must return to the voters at prescribed intervals to seek their mandate to continue in office. This means that officials in a democracy must accept the risk of being voted out of office. The one exception is judges who, to insulate them against popular pressure and help ensure their impartiality, may be appointed for life and removed only for serious improprieties (Tomwarri, 2009).

Democratic elections are inclusive. The definition of citizen and voters education must be large enough to include a large proportion of the adult population. A government chosen by a small, exclusive group is not a democracy, no matter how democratic its internal workings may appear. One of the great dramas of democracy throughout history has been the struggle of excluded groups, whether racial, ethnic or religious minorities, or women to win full citizenship and with it the right to vote and hold office. In the United States for example, only white male property holders enjoyed the right to elect and be elected when the Constitution was signed in 1787. The property qualification disappeared by the early 19th century and women won the right to vote in 1920. Black Americans, however, did not enjoy full voting rights in the southern United States until the civil rights movement of the 1960s. And finally, in 1971, younger citizens were given the right to vote when the United States lowered the voting age from 21 to 18 years (Tomwarri, 2009).

Concept of electoral fraud

Electoral fraud is the illegal interference with the process of an election. Acts of fraud involves affecting vote counts to bring about an election result, whether by increasing the vote share of the favoured candidate, depressing the vote share of the rival candidates or both. What electoral fraud is, under law varies from country to country; methods which are illegal in one country may not be in another. Many kinds of vote fraud are outlawed in electoral

legislation but others are in violation of general laws such as those banning assault, harassment or libel (Wikipedia, 2009).

Strategies for voters' education in secondary schools

There are several strategies that may be adopted for smooth, efficient and effective education of voters towards any elections in Nigeria, amongst which are:

- (a) Spatial distribution of Schools e.g. geographical boundaries of States should be taken into consideration. That is, school must be selected from all Local Government Areas and almost equal number should be selected from Local Government Areas within each State;
- (b) Specialized Secondary Schools. That is, in selecting schools, consideration should be given to Technical Schools alongside other secondary schools.
- (c) Local of Schools: In selecting schools, undue advantage should not be given to schools in urban areas over those in rural areas.
- (d) Principals with Experiences in Voter Education: Where any Principal has organized voter education, events in his or her school previously, such person should be so selected (Afemikhe, 2012).

However, other strategies and objectives of voter education also include:

- (i) sensitization of the school community on the importance of voter education in schools and provide enlightenment on how to organize school activities;
- (ii) encourage each school to initiate voter education activities and designate a teacher as a Voter Educator teacher and co-ordinator;
- (iii) establish a good relationship with INEC and school authorities as partners in Nigeria's democratization process;
- (iv) encourage democratic processes in schools activities;
- (v) carry out any other activity that may enhance the sustainability of democracy in Nigeria;
- (vi) lectures on electoral and democratic issues at least once in a term in consultation with INEC and collaboration with centers;

- (vii) visits to democratic institutions such as Legislative Assemblies, Courts, Traditional political institutions etc;
- (viii) Provision of electoral publications by INEC to schools and distribution of same at community levels. These publications should be simplified and user friendly. This should include creation of face-book and twitter accounts to share ideas. This will be moderated to curb abuses;
- (ix) Pursue the feasibility of the use of sports and popular culture to foster voter education activities in schools; and
- (x) Contents of voter education at school level should include provisions of the Nigerian 1999 Constitutions Amended and the Electoral Acts as well as INEC documents and other relevant publications (Imuetinyan, 2012).

Apart from the above strategies, other scholars opined that in order to build institutional framework for voters' education programme, there must be an integrated educational curriculum, creation of voters education club in secondary schools which will be easily accessible to both students who are eligible and other Nigerians. Furthermore, schools in creek areas should be reached for proper orientation. Make use of State Ministries of Education and Ministries of Information, Youths and Culture so that what ever are agreed upon will be transmitted to the youths in particular and eligible Nigerians in general (Igini, 2012).

While addressing audience at one-day interactive session on voter education for South-South Zonal Implementation Committee meeting, Anyiwe opined that the INEC theme on "catch them young for democratic governance" ought to be "catch the old fish". This according to him owes largely to the endemic corruption in our society which has become the order of the day. Those who looted the nation's treasury are found in the fore-front in the nation's political class, front-seats at the churches or mosque; the same people come to teach the younger ones to be discipline and upright. How can the nation move forward? How can the old layers ask the young ones not to lie or be corrupt when they themselves are found wanting? (Anyiwe, 2012)

Table 2 illustrates the level of coverage and preparedness of INEC to educate voters towards the forthcoming elections in Nigeria. cursory look at the table will reveal that there is little or not significant efforts towards educating the eligible voters in Nigeria. With eleven States having percentage of 25 in

the number of States covered for this study, it can therefore be concluded that INEC is ill-prepared for voters' education in Nigeria.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, we have analyzed voters education in secondary schools in Nigeria in virtually all states of the country.

The survey revealed both the intensity and pervasiveness of the ill-prepared of INEC towards educating voters in the country which is indeed a potential threat to the nascent and sustainable political development and democracy. Though, a number of steps are being taken by the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) to curb any unforeseeable crises in terms of placating the restive minority groups but much seem not to have been achieved as evident in the ill-prepared of voters education and insecurity of lives and property, spate of armed robbery attacks, assassinations of political opponents, ill-prepared of voters education towards the forthcoming elections in Nigeria, electoral fraud, coupled with the seeming helplessness of security agencies to handle criminal acts.

The question of sensitization of secondary schools students towards sustainable electoral process in Nigeria political system places us in a dilemma and as is usually the case; we must try to strike a balance between the opposing factors.

On the one hand, since the raw materials and the clientele of voters' education and political participation in Nigeria political system is uncertain and since there would be likelihood of spending quite possible wasting-public money of which end-results will not be guaranteed, it is the opinion of the authors that the policy is exercised in futility. The consequence of "failure" in any political experiment, which involves voters' education, the political participation and the use of public funds are considerable; the political risks to the elected "masters" would often be greater than they would readily authorize (Uhunmwangho and Urhoghide, 2011).

Situated within the context of this paper, the political culture as a tool of analysis helps in providing useful insights for the appreciation of the political behaviour of the individuals and groups in the society. The content of political culture is in large measure unique to each society and therefore tends to reveal major themes in each society (Guardian, 2007). Electoral behaviour of the elites in Nigeria poignantly revealed by the prevailing political culture in the country given the fact that electoral fraud in most parts

of the states especially during electoral process are elites induced. The political culture of a society therefore influenced the individual's voters' education and/or political participation to the extent that, it underscores the value which the very political system, regime and ideologies place on it (Osaghae, 2002).

Conclusively, it has been posited that popular voters education and participation is an essential ingredient of democratic government, which is linked directly or tangentially to other major features of democracy such as consent, encouragement of each target schools to initiate voters education activities, design schools as bridges to reach communities and carry out other activities that are targeting at democratic sustenance in Nigeria and also to encourage democratic processes in schools activities.

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Table 1: Elections in Nigeria since Independence

| PRESIDENTIAL | PARLIAMENTARY | SENATE |
|--------------|---------------|--------|
| 1979 | 1959 | 1979 |
| 1983 | 1964 | 1983 |
| 1993 | 1979 | 1992 |
| 1999 | 1983 | 1998 |
| 2003 | 1992 | 1999 |
| 2007 | 1998 | 2003 |
| | 1999 | 2007 |
| | 2003 | |
| | 2007 | |

Source: (INEC Office, Benin City).

Table 2: Breakdown of Allocation of Voters Education to Some States

| S/No. | State | No. of Sec. Schools | No. of Schools Selected | Percentage (%) |
|-------|---------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|----------------|
| 1. | Abia | 277 | 138 | 50% |
| 2. | Adamawa | 86 | 94 | 50% |
| 3. | Akwa-Ibom | 347 | 86 | 25% |
| 4. | Anambra | 351 | 87 | 25% |
| 5. | Bayelsa | 152 | 76 | 50% |
| 6. | Delta | 362 | 90 | 25% |
| 7. | Edo | 302 | 75 | 25% |
| 8. | Imo | 311 | 77 | 25% |
| 9. | Kano | 352 | 88 | 25% |
| 10. | Kogi | 306 | 76 | 25% |
| 11. | Lagos | 300 | 150 | 50% |
| 12. | Ogun | 372 | 93 | 25% |
| 13. | Ondo | 339 | 84 | 25% |
| 14. | Oyo | 530 | 132 | 25% |
| 15. | Rivers | 302 | 75 | 25% |
| 16. | Federal Capital Territory | 85 | 59 | 70% |

Source: (INEC Office, Benin City)