

ELECTION MALPRACTICE IN STUDENTS UNION GOVERNMENT OF NNAMDI AZIKIWE UNIVERSITY AWKA: CAUSES, CONSEQUENCES AND PREVENTIVE MEASURES

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Abstract

The study investigated the causes, consequences and preventive measures of election malpractice in student's union government of Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka. Three research questions and one null hypothesis guided the study. The sample comprised 700 undergraduate students. The instrument used in collecting data was the questionnaire titled Causes, Consequence and Preventive Measure of Election Malpractice (CCPEMEM) Data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. Results showed that the major causes of election malpractice amongst others are the desire to gain undue advantage over credible candidates, absence of correct and genuine data, corruption within the security forces and the electoral body. Results also showed the consequences of election malpractice to include amongst others, electoral violence, emergence of shameless and incompetent leaders, lack of transparency and unpopular government. Results also showed the preventive measures of election malpractices to include amongst others that votes should not be bought with money or gift items; the electoral body should be well trained and continued to be trained and materials for elections must be adequate and distributed on time. The implications of the study are that the perpetrators of this election malpractice are our future leaders and If this act is not checked and controlled, they move into the society with the same act and this will mar the development of the society. It was therefore recommended among others that miscreants should not be allowed to contest election. The electoral body should be adequately funded to enable it discharge its responsibilities.

Introduction

The idea of democracy emanated from the ancient Greeks because all male adult citizens participate in discussing and taking decisions about their welfare. In modern day democracy, the populations of sovereign states are so large that, it became very difficult to gather all the people to take decision about state affairs Ofoegbu (2008). Therefore, the need for overhauling the ancient Greeks practice became an issue of paramount importance. However, the selection of the representatives from among all the adult citizens posed its own problems because the method of selection was vague. A system must therefore be developed to make the method of selection easy and acceptable to the citizens hence Election.

Election has been indentified as the vital features of every democratic system of government. The importance of election in any country's political process can never be over emphasized. Election is defined as a systematic process or method by which we choose our leaders who occupy official positions (Alemka & Omotosho 2008). It could be defined as a process whereby all adult citizens who are 18years and above could participate in the selection of their representatives in government. The system of election could be open as exemplified in the show of hands or standing behind the person one supports. It could also be by secret ballot whereby ballot papers and ballot boxes are used. People vote for representatives of their choice secretly such that only the voter knows the candidate he voted for. The candidate who scores the highest number of votes cast becomes the representative of the people in government.

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Some of the electable offices for which elections are conducted before a leader emerges include: the executive and legislative organs. The legislative is known as the Students Representative Council (SRC). The Executive houses many offices such as the office of the president, the vice president, secretary general, director of socials, treasurer, director of sports, financial secretary and public relations officer. There are several reasons for conducting elections which include; it enables people to take part in government, it enhances the legitimacy of the government, it affords the electorate the opportunity to change an unpopular government without violence, it affords the government the opportunity to test the popularity of its programme, it helps to bring public office holders to account for their stewardship to the electorates who hold their re-election in their hands. Election helps the minorities to express their needs and ideas to avoid being swallowed up by the majority and it affords the citizens the opportunity to choose their leaders in the government (Ilo, 2011).

Apparently, in the organization and conduct of election, it must be free and fair. A free and fair election is one in which the electorates are given the opportunity to elect the people they wish to represent them. In order to achieve this, the following precondition should be met:-

a. There must be verification of academic standard, voters should have their school fees print out and identity cards. All voting materials should be made ready. Electoral laws should be put in place for the smooth conduct of the election, voters should be allowed to vote secretly, votes cast in the election must be counted publicly by the electoral officials in the presence of all the candidates and electorates. Adequate and impartial security must be provided through out the duration of the elections and there must be many candidates for the electorates to choose from in order to avoid restricted choice to the electorates.

However, when the necessary pre-conditions for conducting a free and fair election are neglected and not met and the reasons for conducting elections are defeated, election malpractice results. Election malpractice could be defined as the act of cheating, scheming and use of fraud to maneuver an election. According to (Scheduler 2002), election malpractice is the introduction of bias into the administration of election; it is also an act of sabotaging an electoral process with the aim of favouring a particular candidate. It has remained a social ill that dents political system and tarnishes institutions political image. There are several ways students perpetuate this act:- It could be done by hiring personnel who are not university students and provide them with fake identity cards; votes are bought either with money, recharge cards, food and drinks, Ballot stuffing, misrecording of votes, multiple voting, using fake identification cards, bribing the electoral body and the security, misinformation of date, time and venue, use of electronic device, fake school fees print out, rigging, impersonation, falsification of election result, extending the voting period beyond the stipulated time, use of force and threat to influence voting pattern and electoral behaviour, campaigning around the polling unit on the day of election. The actions of the political process of the union government have shifted from the normal electoral process to indulging in electoral malpractice.

Above all, one of the major causes of electoral malpractice is the desire to gain undue advantage over other credible candidates as such act will catapult them to power without healthy competition thereby institutionalizing government that is not a representative of the choice of the students. Another problem confronting the institution is the absence of correct and genuine data. The accurate and correct population of voters cannot be given. How can the election be free and fair when the numbers of correct voters are not known? Also, the poor economic conditions of the majority of the students make social vices like corruption to thrive and make the electorate

susceptible to selling their conscience. The lack of economic stability is a strong motivator for corrupt students who are willing to subvert the electoral process by making elections a “do or die” affair in order to ensure that they get into office with unfettered access to public funds. Corruption is another cankerworm that has eaten deep within the security forces. In most cases, the security agents that are supposed to protect the polling units and ballot boxes are obviously biased in favour of a candidate (Okeke 2005).

Perpetrators of election malpractice indulge in unholy practice that brings about electoral violence during election. Electoral violence can be seen as any random or organized act that seeks to undermine delay or otherwise influence an electoral process through verbal, threat, intimidation, hate, speech, disinformation, physical assault, blackmail, destruction of property or assassination. The victims of electoral violence are people, places, things, properly etc. The common grounds on which electoral violence occurs are during registration, campaigns balloting on Election Day and electoral outcomes or announcement of results. Corruption allows emergence of shameless and incompetent leaders, election rigging through violence, Ballot box stuffing becomes the order of the day. Lack of transparency that produces unpopular choice of candidate .

The first solution to an electoral problem is to ensure that every vote counts. Therefore, the vote must be a determining factor to elect leaders and representatives. It is the means of establishing social contract between leaders and the voters; therefore the integrity of the voters must be ensured. This can be achieved when the correct number of voters are gotten otherwise they will continue to inflate election figures through multiple voting. The credibility and integrity of any election depends on a combination of factors i.e. the logistics (men and materials) the law and method of voting. We can have free and fair elections if the electoral body must be well trained and continuously trained. Materials for election must be adequately distributed on time. The security agencies must be empowered to curtail the threat and actual incidence of violence in and around the electoral process and improving the transparency of the vote counting process, the transmission and tabulation of results and enabling a process of election observation that helps to build confidence in and around the electoral process. (Uche, 2007) .

Student’s union election which is conducted in academic environment should be credible, free and fair, devoid of irregularities, where student’s electorates choose their leaders without fear of favour and intimidation, but by their common consent. The student’s union government remains a government that should be built under democratic principle. As a result of the democratic nature of the government, the offices, and office holders are determined by the majority of the students, through periodic free and fair election. However, this appears not to be the case in the elections of student’s union government of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, where students are intimidated, threatened and coerced into voting for candidates who are not their choice. Some students are also cajoled into selling their vote in exchange for money or mean gift item like recharge cards. This results in wrong people occupying legitimate positions which lead to poor representation and other untold consequences. This situation therefore requires urgent attention, hence the problem of the study which is to investigate the causes, consequences and preventive measures for election malpractice in students union government of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the causes of election malpractice in student’s union government?
2. What are the consequences of election malpractice in student’s union government?

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3. What measures could be taken to prevent election malpractice in student's union government?

Method

The study is a survey carried out in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State. The population of the study comprised all the second and third year under graduate students of 2013/2014 academic session in the fourteen Faculties of the University. The second and third year students were studied because they were considered to have stayed long enough in the university to be able to understand issues relating to election malpractice in the institution. The total population of the second and third year students in all Facilities was 13,119 comprising 6675 second year and 6444 third years. The sample of the study was 700 students both males and females. In composing the sample, simple random sampling was used to select the seven faculties out of the fourteen faculties in the university. The 7 faculties selected were, Agriculture, Arts, Biological sciences, Education, Management Sciences, Law, and physical sciences. In the seven facilities selected, there are altogether 4,452 second year students and 3,860 third year students. Using proportionate random sampling technique 9.1% of 3,860 students amounting to 351 students and 7.9% of 4,452 amounting to 351 students respectively was selected. Then simple random sampling was used again to select 50 students from each of the seven faculties for second year and third year students (Academic planning unit, Awka NAU 2014). The instrument used in collecting data for the study was a structured questionnaire constructed by the researchers and titled Causes, Consequence and Preventive Measure of Election Malpractice (CCPEMEM) The questionnaire has two parts A and B. Part A sought information on the personal data of the respondents. Part B sought information required to answer the research questions and had three sections, 1, 2, & 3 and these sought information on the causes, consequences and preventive measures for election malpractice respectively. The instrument contains a total of 30 items. The response mode adopted in the questionnaire was the four Point scale of Strongly Agree (SA) Agree (A) Disagree (D) Strongly Disagree (SD).

The instrument was validated by three experts, one in the area of measurement and evaluation and two in sociology of Education, all at University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The validators were requested to assess the items in terms of relevance, clarity and adequacy. Their inputs were reflected in the final production of the questionnaire. The reliability of the instrument was established using the test retest method, the two tests were administered within two weeks interval, on 20 students outside the study area and the two sets of scores were correlated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation-Coefficient Statistic and the co-efficient value of 0.75 was obtained. The questionnaire was administered to the respondents by the researchers with the help of 14 research assistants, who were paired for each of the seven faculties, All copies of the questionnaire distributed were collected back because of the on the spot administration and collection technique used. Data collected were analyzed using mean and standards deviation. The four point mode used adopted the mean of 2.50 or the cut off point accepting means of the items i.e. positive or negative with the decision rule that only items with mean rating of 2.50 and above would be regarded as having attracted positive responses, while any item with mean ratings below 2.50 would be taken to have attracted negative responses.

Results

Research question one:

What are the causes of election malpractice in student’s union government of Nnamdi Azikiwe university, Awka?

Results for this researcher question were shown in table 1.

Table 1: Mean ratings of the respondents on the causes of election malpractice in student’s union government of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. N = 700

The following are the causes of election malpractice in SUG of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

S/N	Items	\bar{X}	SD	Decision
1.	Incompetent electoral body	3.06	0.73	Agree
2.	Corruption on the part of the electoral body	2.80	0.74	Agree
3.	Absence of genuine and electronically generated voters register	2.90	0.67	Agree
4.	Politics is perceived as quick money making industry	3.10	0.57	Agree
5.	Poor election management	3.00	0.37	Agree
6.	Security of the voters are not ensured	3.70	0.74	Agree
7.	Some students want to be more famous and be recognized by every student in the campus	2.90	0.68	Agree
8.	Some students allow their votes to be bought with money, airtime, food, drinks etc	3.10	0.32	Agree
9.	Some students are intimidated and threatened to vote against their wish	2.90	0.78	Agree
10.	Misinformation about the date, time and venue of election	3.02	0.43	Agree
	Total	27.80	6.03	
	Cluster \bar{x}	2.80	0.60	Agree

Data in table 1 showed that the respondents gave positive responses to all the items on the causes of election malpractice in student’s union government with mean scores above 2.50. The cluster mean of 2.80 and standard deviation of 0.60 indicated that the respondents agreed to all items as the causes of election malpractices in student’s union government of Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka.

Research Question Two:

What are the consequences of election malpractice in student’s union government of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka?

Results for research question two were shown in table 2

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Table 2: Mean ratings of the respondents on the consequences of election malpractice in student’s union government of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. N = 700.

The following are consequences of election malpractice in SUG of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

S/N	Items	\bar{X}	SD	Decision
1.	There is instability of the government	3.01	0.75	Agree
2.	Gives rise to corruption and emergence of incompetent leaders	2.97	0.37	Agree
3.	Rigging election through violence and ballot box stuffing becomes the order of the day	3.02	0.74	Agree
4.	Inefficiency in handling political posts	2.98	0.35	Agree
5.	It brings about crisis in the institution	3.09	0.43	Agree
6.	Peoples’ choices of candidates are denied	3.01	0.75	Agree
7.	Some candidates are marginalized and denied of the opportunity of using their talent to contribute to the development of the institution	3.06	0.46	Agree
8.	Embezzlement of fund	3.02	0.43	Agree
9.	Lack of human and infrastructural development	2.84	0.72	Agree
10.	It brings about ineffective government	2.95	0.42	Agree
	Total	29.95	5.42	
	Cluster \bar{x}	2.99	0.54	

Data in table 2 showed that all the items on the consequences of election malpractice in student’s union government attracted positive responses with mean scores above 2.50. The cluster mean of 2.99 and standard deviation of 0.54 indicated that the respondents agreed to all the consequences of election malpractice in student’s union government of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Research Question Three:

What measures could be taken to prevent election malpractice in student’s union government of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka? Results for this research question were shown in table 3:

Table 3: Mean ratings of the respondents on the measures that could be taken to prevent election malpractice in student’s union government of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka N = 700

The following measures could be taken to prevent election malpractice in SUG of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

S/N	Items	\bar{X}	SD	Decision
1.	Electoralates should not allow their votes to be bought with money or gift items	3.06	0.73	Agree

2.	Political education which sensitizes the electorates on their voters right and civic rights should be injected into the system	3.02	0.40	Agree
3.	The electoral body should be transparent to eliminate rigging and falsification of results	3.11	0.66	Agree
4.	Offenders of election malpractice should be punished so that, it will serve as a deterrent to others	3.16	0.48	Agree
5.	Candidates should be made to face open debate to enable the electorates assess their capabilities and plans	2.95	0.42	Agree
6.	Provision of adequate and tight security during elections	3.02	0.74	Agree
7.	Sponsorship of the candidates by either lecturers, Admin staff or wealthy individuals should be discourage	2.97	0.37	Agree
8.	Electorates should be duly identified from their various departments by their HODs.	3.01	0.75	agree
9.	Any candidate caught sharing gift items or money should be disqualified	2.95	0.42	Agree
10.	Changing of date for any scheduled election should be totally avoided	3.06	0.46	Agree
	Total	30.31	5.43	
	Cluster \bar{x}	3.03	0.54	Agree

Data in table 3 reveal the opinion of the respondents on measures for preventing election malpractice in student's union government of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The table showed that the ten items were positively responded to, with mean scores well above 2.50. The cluster mean of 3.03 indicated that the respondents agreed to all the items as good measures that could be use to prevent election malpractice in student union government elections.

Discussion

The results as presented in table 1 showed that all the respondents agreed to all the items as the major causes of election malpractice in student's union government. The findings agree with the Opinion of Rahaman (2009) who posited that the major causes of election malpractice are "incompetent electoral body", absence of genuine and electronically generated voters register, "politics perceived as quick money making industry", and poor election management".

In relation to consequences of election malpractice as presented in table 2, results showed that the respondents agreed to all the following "instability of the government", "corruption allows emergence of sham and incompetent leaders", rigging election through violence and stuffing of ballot box becomes order of the day", inefficiency in handling political posts", crisis in the institution", "people's choice of candidates are denied", "people are marginalized and are denied of the opportunity of using their talent to contribute to the development of the institution "Embezzlement of Fund", lack of human and infrastructural development", and ineffective government as the consequences of election malpractice. Some of the above findings confirmed the observation of Uche (2001), that election malpractice brings about crisis in the institution,

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inefficiency in handling political posts and corruption allows emergence of shameless and incompetent leaders.

As regards preventive measures, the respondents also agreed to all the listed items, some of which are that electorates should not allow their votes to be bought with money or gift items, electoral body should be made to face open debates, no candidate should be sponsored and any candidate caught sharing money or gift items should be disqualified.

Conclusion

The results of the study showed the different causes of election malpractice exhibited by students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University during student union elections. This shows that the students do not adhere to the rules and regulations of the institution thereby making the educational sector appear to producing graduates who are not sufficiently disciplined and hence not perturbed about breaking the law and who are morally bankrupt. However, if students should be made to abide by the rules and regulations and shun corruption, the issue of election malpractice will be a thing of the past and they should help to move our society forward because the institution is a part of the society.

Implications of the Study

Universities serve as the intellectual soul of the people and their primary aims include, to search for and to teach the truth, confer the highest levels of skills and produce citizens with fully developed minds, capable of making sound judgment on important issues of values and attitudes (Ejike 2011). Universities should therefore produce graduates who are future leaders that should be law abiding, disciplined, morally sound, and intellectually rich and socially adequate; and who will occupy sensitive political post in the societies, nations and the world at large, and function creditably, in their various capacities for the good of mankind.

Recommendations

In other to put an end to election malpractice in student union government, the following may be done;

- 1 The electoral body should be adequately financed to enable it discharge its responsibilities well.
- 2 Miscreants should not be allowed to contest election.
- 3 Security of the voters and election materials should be ensured.
- 4 There should be a thorough check in order to arrest non students who come to vote with faked ID cards.
- 5 The integrity of the voters register should be ensured.

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