

Elections and Electoral Malpractice: Effects on Nigeria's Democratic Stability

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Abstract:- There is an increasing number of sovereign states in the world today claiming to be democratic which gives credence to the claim that democracy is probably the most desirable form of government, as it grants individuals the right to take part in the government of their country directly or through freely chosen representatives. This paper examines the irregularities of elections in Nigeria and its devastating effects on democratic stability in Nigeria. In conducting this investigation, the system theory approach was adopted as the theoretical framework, relying on qualitative approach, using mainly secondary data that were analysed by the use of content and historical analysis. Electoral malpractice has dealt an enormous blow on Nigerian's nascent democracy which has inevitably denied the country of a credible free and fair election in her polity. Electoral irregularities have not just marred democratic stability in Nigeria but have also brought about the violation of fundamental human rights (right to life) of so many Nigerians. The benchmark reviewed in this paper is electoral malpractices since independence. Findings in the study revealed that electoral malpractice in Nigeria have resulted in the imposition of illegitimate and corrupt leaders, with absolute zero regard to the principles of democracy which negate good governance, fundamental human rights, rule of law and constitutionalism. This paper makes recommendations that would serve as panacea to the problems of electoral malpractice and these procedures can help compel a democratic environment which is a prerequisite for free and fair elections.

Keywords: Election, Democracy, Democratic Stability, Electoral Malpractice.

I. INTRODUCTION

The number of sovereign states in the world today claiming to be democratic seems to be on the increase which gives credence to the claim that democracy is probably the most desirable form of government as it believes that it promotes freedom, human rights, better governance due to transparency, etc. This assertion is drawn from the fact that a democratic environment is one where constitutional doctrine such as separation of powers via checks and balances and the rule of law excel. It is also an environment where popular participation is allowed. Invariably, democracy grants individuals the right to take part in the government of their country, directly or through freely chosen representatives. However, for democratic stability, there are fundamental principles which are consistent in some democracies. They include:

1. Citizen Rule: Where citizens share power and civic responsibility to make decisions on how they are governed;
2. Majority rule with an adequate safeguard of the minorities interest;
3. An independent judiciary, free from private and partisan interest. It is designed to protect the system of justice;
4. The principle of protection that upholds basic human rights of citizens as outlined in the constitution;
5. Power is not concentrated in one area but distributed among branches and agencies of government which brings about checks and balances;
6. Government office holders and legislators are subject to term limits;
7. Elections are to be held on a regular and periodic basis and citizens have the opportunity to elect new people to hold official positions in a free and fair election.

Elections and electoral processes are fundamental to the workings of every democratic setting of the modern state. Elections are the major hallmark of a democratic society, as it involves a set of activities leading to the selection of one or more persons out of many to serve in positions of authority in a society. Political scientists and development theorists argue that free, fair and credible elections provide the basis for the emergence of democratic, accountable and legitimate government with the capacity to initiate and implement clearly articulated development programmes.

Credible elections therefore are sine qua non for democratic governance, political stability and national development. Dudley(1982) stated that Nigeria's first attempt to practice parliamentary democracy at independence in 1960 was interrupted by a military coup in 1966. In 1979, Nigeria made a transition from military rule to presidential democracy. Again the democratic government was removed via a military coup in 1983. The third democratic experiment in Nigeria began in 1989 but was aborted in 1993 following the annulment of the presidential election, which would have marked the highpoint of transition. According to Osaghae (1998), due to intense domestic and international pressure on the military government, as well as the sudden demise of then military Head of State, General Sani Abacha, the military government finally relinquished power to an elected civilian government in May 1999.

Since 1999, elections have become more regular in Nigeria. Between 1999 and 2015, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the body responsible for the conduct of elections in Nigeria, has conducted five (5) consecutive general elections for the first time in Nigeria's political history. In the words of Oyovbaire (2008), the period since 1999 has been marked by an extra-ordinary process towards the stability of democracy in Nigeria. Although, elections are now more regular in Nigeria, the quality of these elections has become a matter of grave concern to both the actors and observers.

Elections in Nigeria have so far thwarted the foundation upon which democracy is built due to electoral malpractice, as the management of electoral processes is less successful. The rules guiding elections are ambiguous, ever changing or easily maneuvered; the electoral regulations and rules are institutionally less effective; the political bigwigs are the gladiators in their conducts, hence the electorates are often powerless as they live at the mercy of political stalwarts and political outcomes. The political barons, who have special interests, impose unpopular candidates and employ every form of political gimmick to influence elections against the general interest of people, for their selfish interest.

Electoral malpractice in Nigeria dates back and was evident in the 1964/65, 1979, 1983, 1993, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019 general elections. According to Nwokeke (2011), between 1999 and 2007, electoral malpractice in the form of election riggings has been accompanied with bloodshed and this have claimed the lives of so many Nigerians especially popular contestants and these political killings are executed by hired assassins from evil politicians who want power by all means.

1.1 Nature of the Problem

Democracy in Nigeria is aimed at ensuring political stability and promoting fundamental human rights. The issue of elections has always been a recurrent theme in most political discourses in Nigeria. Negative connotations are often used to describe elections in Nigeria. Elections are seen as a "do or die" affair with large scale malpractice and rigging at all levels which have degenerated from bad to worse. Due to the suicidal nature of Nigerian politics, the rate of citizen participation in elections these days has drastically reduced to the limited choice or lack of qualified candidates. Lack of candidates with vision has made the electorate politically weak. The electorates are sometimes disenfranchised and the alienated political barons employ the use of coercion to seize power. Adekanye (1990:2) asserted that because of the history of electoral fraud, elections in the country have often been associated with political tension, crisis and violence. Politics is seen as serious business as the winner wins everything and the loser loses everything. The quest to win elections and control governmental powers by all means have also claimed the lives of both the electorates and some candidates by hoodlums who want to control government by dubious means.

Consequently, those who have the interest of the country at heart have resorted to shun politics for fear of being killed in the election process and this has posed a serious threat to Nigerian democracy and its sustainability. Kurfi (2005:101) observed that electoral malpractice is synonymous with elections in Nigeria. The aim of electoral malpractice is to frustrate the democratic aspiration of citizens who have voted or would have voted someone instead of the winner. These days, votes do not count because whatever happens, the electoral body must deliver and their decision cannot be questioned. This trend has actually undermined the chances of successful elections and democratic stability in Nigeria.

II. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

2.1 Elections

An election is a formal decision making process by which a population chooses an individual to hold public office. According to BritannicaEncyclopaedia (2009), elections have been the usual mechanism by which modern representative democracy operates since the 17th century. Elections are the means through which the people exercise their sovereign right to choose who governs them and what the political and other priorities of their government should be, which invariably means that Democratic Elections are thus opportunity for the people to express their sovereignty through the ballot to confer legitimacy to their government, renew its mandate if necessary or withdraw from it the authority to govern. This is the basis of accountable government (INEC, 2011).

According to Eya (2003), election is seen as the selection of a person or persons for office as by ballot and making choice as between alternatives. It is the method adopted in the selection of persons for political offices. A fair, free and credible election according to him, must have some basic structures which include: statutory provisions establishing the electoral bodies, delineation of wards/constituencies, registration of political parties, registration of voters, recruitment and training of ad-hoc staff, procurement of electoral materials, logistics, screening of candidates, provision of polling agents, accreditation of voters, counting votes and providing avenues for settlement of disputed results. He sees electoral frauds and malpractice as improper, illegal, deceit or immoral behaviours and conducts which violate the principles of free and fair electoral processes.

Onyeka (2002) posits that elections extend and enhance the amount of popular participation in the political system, stating that electoral history started with restrictive voting based on sex, property ownership and tax payment. She indicated basic constituents of the electoral process to include mass media, political parties, pressure groups and political opinions. They all converge on the electoral process to determine who occupies public office and ensure that the elected official represent their constituencies effectively.

In same vein, the Political Bureau Report (1981) states four basic conditions necessary for the conduct of a free and fair election and they include:

1. An honest competent, non-partisan administration to run elections;
2. Enabling rules and regulations – electoral laws;
3. A developed system of political parties;
4. An independent judiciary to interpret electoral laws.

Countries with weak rule of law, often times do not meet international standards with elections being free and fair, reason being that incumbent governments interfere with the electoral process. Non-governmental entities can also interfere with elections, through physical force, verbal intimidation which can result in improper casting or counting of votes. Therefore, monitoring and minimizing electoral fraud is also an ongoing task in countries with strong tradition of free and fair elections. According to Ake (2000), elections are a perversion of democracy because they connote popular but not delegated power. The reminiscence of direct democracy which Ake recounts is problematic in a complex and completed post-modern society, while Adejumbi (2002) asserts that liberal democracy is in crisis in many countries of the world, whether developed or developing. In a nutshell, elections are fast becoming a shadow of democracy.

2.2 Electoral Malpractice

The term electoral malpractice is used to describe all dishonest and fraudulent activities that interfere with the democratic “nature” of elections. The fraudulent practices during elections are common in countries with political apathy, instability, lack of political awareness and high poverty rate. Causes of electoral malpractice have been identified as including economic problems, high poverty rate, weak courts, temporary staff problem, indiscipline etc., and electoral malpractice can be prevented or reduced to the barest minimum with the aid of training and educational programmes that create and raise political awareness and reforms in the electoral system.

2.3 Democracy

Spicer (2011) asserted that almost everything about democracy is under contestation. Scholars do not agree on the origin, meaning and the manner it is or should be practiced in different societies. If we understand democracy as referring to the system of government where political authority and power flows from the citizen and is exercised for their benefits, many ancient nations and people could lay claim to having been practitioners of it albeit in varying degrees.

Huntington (1991) sees democracy as a political system which is considered democratic because the most popular candidates are chosen through fair, honest and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes and in which virtually all the adult population are qualified to vote.

For Schumpeter (1947), democracy means that the people have the opportunity of accepting or refusing the men who are to govern them. By this, democracy implies conducting elections and choosing leaders that will represent the majority.

Democracy promotes political participation of all citizens (adults). The full participation of the people during electioneering gives the new government a legitimate foundation to govern. Thus, if democracy is all about to choose who should govern the people, then, election is one principal way to select leaders. Brennan (2013) listed the characteristics of representative democracy to include free & unbiased press, periodic elections, universal suffrage, informed public, secret ballot elections, freedom of speech, political parties, independent judicial system etc.

2.4 Democratic Stability

Research on democratic stability in most developing nations especially those experiencing the “third wave” has faced a lot of challenges for various reasons which include: political institutions in developing countries are not yet developed, party systems are still fragile, electoral formulas are characterized by, and in most cases, one cannot separate personal influence of exceptional political leaders from their institutional capabilities.

Diamond (1999) summarized democratic ingredients of stability thus:

All governments rest on some kind of mixture of coercion and consent but democracies are unique in the degree to which the stability depends on the consent of a majority of those governed. Almost as a given, theories of democracy stress that democratic stability requires a wide spread belief among both elites and masses that democracy is the best form of government for their society and hence that the democratic regime is morally entitled to rule.

Democratic stability presupposes that the government should pursue and represent the interest of the people. A government which represents and pursues the interest of the people must be accountable, responsive and responsible to the people as these enhance people’s affection and support for the system. Thus, a developed democratic culture can be seen as a sine-qua-non for democratic stability

To achieve democratic stability, there is the need to understand that there is more to democracy than elections and voting. There are certain tenets upon which democracy can be nurtured and sustained. These include: sovereignty of the people, where government is created and sustained by the consent of the people through elected representatives; majority rule and minority rights, where the rights of the

minority must be protected, otherwise the majority rule loses its meaning. Rule of law and good governance, respect for civil and political rights, economic prosperity, free press and an independent judiciary. Thus democratic stability can be measured by the percentage of voters in a country who consider democracy as an indispensable way of life and are ready to go every length to protect it.

III. METHODOLOGY

Being a predominantly desk study, data will be gathered mainly from secondary source. The paper adopted Content Analysis method to critically analyse available data to arrive at findings and conclusions in the study. For this work, we adopted the System Theory. Understanding and explaining social reality ultimately depends on the theoretical preference one chooses to anchor one's research. The System approach is one of such approaches in the study of political systems and institutions.

Systems Theory in political science was conceived by David Easton in 1953. He defined System Theory as "interaction in any society through which authoritative and binding allocations of values are made and implemented".

In Alapiki (2004), a system generally involves the following elements: a set of connected parts or things; a set of objects together with the relationship between the object and between their attitudes; an inter-dependence of parts and a boundary of some kind between the system and its environment.

Broadly speaking, systems theory is characterized by the following;

1. Input (Demand and Support)
2. Output (Decision on Policies)
3. Feedback
4. Environment

In the light of the above scholarly views, it is evident that the system theory stresses that every system (social, economic, legal, judicial or political) has structures and these structures are required to perform certain functions, duties and responsibilities in order to perform certain functions, duties and advancements. It is therefore in consideration of these that the choice of the system theory is adopted.

IV. ELEMENTS OF ELECTION

Election serves as an important pre-requisite, mechanism and viable means of ensuring orderliness in the process of change and leadership succession in a democracy. It gives legitimacy and political authority to any administration. Elections also reinforce stability and legitimacy of the political community, it links citizens to each other and thereby confirm the viability of the polity. It serves a self actualizing purpose of confirming the worth and dignity of individual citizens as it gives people an opportunity to have their say and through expressing partisanship, to satisfy their need of a sense of belonging.

Elections whether held under authoritarian or democratic regimes have almost same characteristics. Elections and the campaigns preceding them are dramatic events that are accompanied by rallies, banners, posters, headlines and television coverage, all of which call attention to the importance of participation in the event. Candidates, political parties and interest groups representing diverse interests and objectives invoke the symbols of nationalism or patriotism, reform or revolution.

Elections help to shape and sharpen political accountability between the governors and governed via reciprocity and exchange. According to Sandbrook (1988), elections and the struggle for power are essential because they give the oppressed class(es) the chances to put the question of alternative ideologies on the agenda and therefore constitute an important stage in the socialist quest to extend democratic control to the social, economic and political sphere.

Therefore, for elections to thrive, there should be the establishment of a competent, well defined, relatively independent and non-partisan electoral body that will be responsible for the conduct of election. Also, there should be an independent and impartial judiciary that will interpret electoral law as well as adjudicate on electoral matters. An unbiased mass media devoid of influence should be instituted together with the police force that will help supervise the conduct of election and these will give credence to the success of elections (Adejumobi, 1997).

V. DIMENSIONS OF ELECTORAL MALPRACTICE IN NIGERIA

Electoral malpractice has been categorized into three types: pre-election, election period and post-election period (Ugwuja, 2015). The pre-election types deal with the manipulation of rules, election period deals with the manipulation of votes while in post-election, we have the manipulation of voting.

By manipulation of rules, electoral laws are distorted, so as to favour one party or contestant in the election. For example, when the rules administering candidacy prevent certain political forces from contesting elections or an adult population is excluded from voting. The manipulation of voters is either to distort voters' preference or sway preference expression, while voting manipulation consists of electoral maladministration. Illegal possession of ballot boxes, deliberate doctoring of election results, illegal printing of voters card, under aged voting, intimidation of candidates and voters, deliberate refusal to supply electoral materials to certain areas, incapacities of INEC, falsification of election results, compilation of fictitious names on voters' list, announcing results in areas where no election was held, unauthorized announcement of election result, change of list of electoral officials, bias in the way electoral dispute are adjudicated in the courts, lack of transparency in the organization of the elections etc. are some of the electoral

frauds identified by Ibrahim (2007) as some of the dimensions of electoral malpractice in Nigeria.

VI. HISTORICAL REVIEW OF ELECTORAL MALPRACTICE IN NIGERIA

When Nigeria gained independence in 1960, the hope and aspiration of Nigerians to attain nationhood began to fade evidently, emanating from the way elections were conducted after the departure of the colonial British. After the dent on democracy in the first and second republics, democracy in Nigerian context was seen as a miscarried concept analyzed only by the political elites to suit their interests.

6.1 *The General Elections of 1964/Western Election of 1965*

There was upheaval from the general election of 1964 resulting from electoral malpractice which necessitated fresh election in 1965. The 1965 election was not free of fraudulent practices too, as it was revealed that electoral officers were partnering with the political party that was favoured by the federal government to disallow voters from the opposing political party from filling their allocated nomination papers. Dudley (1981) and Anifowose (1982) summarized the nature of the electoral malpractice thus: Akintola of the NNNDP, with the support of federal government, carried out a staggering horrific rigging machinery, thuggery, obstruction and punitive control to give NNNDP an overwhelming victory. Dudley (1982) also noted that the deputy leader of the NNNDP had boasted before the elections that whether the electorate voted for the NNNDP or not, NNNDP would win the election.

The government of the NNNDP headed by Akintola was rejected by the people but there was disappointment by the members of the Action Group (AG) as their attempt to vote Akintola and his party out of office failed. They then resorted to violence in the country, which led to the military takeover of government in January 15, 1966, which ended the first democratic experience in Nigeria.

6.2 *The General Election of 1979*

Nigerian democracy was tested for the second time with the General Election of 1979. The second republic brought with it the 1979 constitution which made provision for various political parties and a presidential system of government to replace the parliamentary system which was seen by Nigerians as the best option.

Five different political parties; Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP), United Party of Nigeria (UPN), People's Redemption Party (PRP), Great Nigerian People's Party (GNPP) and National Party of Nigeria (NPN) were created and competed in the election. The NPN under the leadership of Shehu Shagari won and produced the first executive president of Nigeria.

However, the military administration in power played a dubious role in influencing and determining the outcome of the 1979 election. The election was a replica of the previous elections carried out in the country. Awolowo challenged the

outcome of the election in court, but the court nullified his effort.

6.3 *The General Election of 1983*

Four years after the 1979 election, another election was conducted and NPN the incumbent government won the election using tremendous rigging and violence. This generated so much violence which led to military takeover in December 1983 and as a result brought to an end the second republic.

Although the 1979 election brought some relief as regards to how relatively free it was, compared to the 1964/65 elections, the 1983 elections uttered the rewarding standards set by the 1979 election. Pointing out the level of electoral malpractice in the 1983 election, Kurfi (2005) noted: all sorts of strategies including manipulation of ballot were employed in other to win elections.

The 1983 election is characterized as one of the most corrupt elections ever conducted in Nigeria. Iyayi (2005:2) captions this argument, when he stated that elections, massive electoral fraud, the conception and practice of politics as warfare, the lack of continuity in the political platforms used by members of the political class, high levels of opportunism and thus a low level of commitment to the different variants of right wing political ideologies that characterize the political class, the objectification of politics and the mobilization of ethnic identities as the basis for defining the legitimacy of claims of political power. The nature of politics and political parties in the country is such that many men and women of character and ability simply stay out of national politics.

6.4 *The General Election of 1993*

The military government under the leadership of Gen I.B Babangida in 1993, introduced the two party system namely: Social Democratic Party (SDP) and National Republican Convention (NRC). These two parties were seen as the hope of Nigerians to end military administration in Nigeria. The two party system was a welcomed development because all ethnic interests had no choice than to accommodate themselves in either of the parties, as candidates were chosen on grounds of competence.

The election was adjudged the freest but was annulled by the then military head of state Gen. Babangida on June 12, 1993. The annulment of this election's result that was purportedly won by the SDP under the leadership of M.K.O Abiola, threatened the political stability and unity of Nigeria and pushed the country back to deep seated political turmoil and further military authoritarianism.

Babangida handed over to an interim government led by Chief Ernest Shonekon while General Sani Abacha dethroned the interim government and ruled the country until his demise.

6.5 The General Election of 1999

Three political parties were formed, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), All Peoples Party (APP) and the Alliance for Democracy (AD). Before the elections, the military promised lots of transition but ended up transferring power from one military government to another. This distorted the polity so that Nigerians no longer showed interest in politics due to successive military dictatorship and the annulment of the June 12, 1993 election which was seen as free and fair. The General election of 1999 was won by the PDP under the leadership of former military head of state, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo.

6.6 The General Election of 2003

This election brought some hope for Nigeria because it handed over power to a civilian regime. Nigerians were desperate for democratic stability as they did not want the military to take hold of power again. The election took a different look from what was obtainable in the previous elections. Politics was now seen as the means of acquiring and looting the nation's treasury. It was this quest for money that prompted the incumbents to clinch onto power for more tenure.

According to Aina (2006), the elections were adjudged as greatly flawed by International observers, but it presented for the first time in history of Nigeria politics, peaceful civilian transition. The level of electoral malpractice in the general election of 2003 was unparalleled. Ogunsanwo (2003:15), on the conduct of the election, said one thing was unique, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was genuinely not in control. Rigging, violence and intimidation were so pervasive and on such naked display and this made a mockery of the electoral process. As we had results in areas where elections did not take place, killings on election related issues and the twenty-nine (29) registered political parties rejected the results announced by INEC. Momoh (2005:51) posited: it is questionable whether what we had in 1999 and 2003 could be rightly qualified as elections and not selection or before still, allocation of positions.

6.7 The General Election of 2007

This election was not far from previous elections conducted in the country. Electoral malpractice in this election went scientific with the introduction of electronic voting. In spite of INEC's promise of free and fair elections, local and international observers categorized it as the most damning kind of election ever conducted anywhere in the world. Iyayi (2007) notes: The general election of April 2007 surpassed that of 2003 elections in the level of fraud, violence, rigging, criminality and complicity by the various organs of the state in the electoral farce that occurred. This election was characterized with lots of challenges from some of the elections outcomes while fresh elections were declared in states like Edo and Ekiti.

6.8 The General Elections of 2011

The April 2011 general election was hailed as being the most credible in the history of the country by domestic and international observers. However, it was not void of electoral malpractice. The election was characterised by violence and the culture of impunity and desperation with which some political actors played the electoral game with the sole intent of remaining in power at all cost was unparalleled.

Despite the paradox of primordial reactions that followed the outcome of the 2011 elections, the elections could be said to have marked a democratic leap-forward in the annals of elections in Nigeria.

6.9 The General Elections of 2015

The general election of 2015 was the fifth in a row since the military left the political scene in 1999. At this stage, electoral malpractice has gone digital; ineffectiveness of the smart card readers, late arrival of electoral materials, money politics, political violence, gross electoral malpractice and the use of ethno-religious identities in shaping voting platforms of the electorate etc. mainly characterized the general election of 2015.

6.10 The General Elections of 2019

The 2019 general elections were not with much marked difference from that of 2015. However, the 2015 elections were adjudged relatively more peaceful than that of 2019. The violence which manifested in killings, maimings and other forms of electoral thuggery activities marked the election out as the most violent in the history of Nigeria. Malpractice activities varied from state to state, with high prevalence rate in states like Rivers.

VII. CONCLUSION

Electoral malpractice in Nigeria since Independence in 1960 has hindered the country's hope of democratic stability. For democracy which is government of the majority to be stable, the government in power must be legitimate. According to Nwosu (1976:6), the ruling government cannot command legitimacy through the use of force; it is the right of the people to grant or withdraw legitimacy from government. Electoral malpractice that has characterized our elections in Nigeria has made it almost impossible to produce a government that will be popularly acceptable. This is because some of the leaders emerged victorious in elections as analysed in this work found themselves in the corridors of power using all forms of manipulations and this restricted the chances of true candidates from winning election even though they are the people's choice.

Electoral malpractice has instigated the emergence of bad politicians who want power by hook or crook. They employ every means to clinch onto power and the installation of these candidates result in corruption and capital accumulation for selfish benefit. The laws guiding the principles of a democratic government have been perverted.

Electoral Malpractice does not just destroy people but the nation as a whole making the state become backward and it affects every sphere of society (social, economic, political, religion etc.).

There is no gainsaying that electoral processes offer safe rule bound method for arbitrating political and social conflicts through the selection of representatives. Credible elections create legitimate government that enjoy popular support for programmes and policies, because when we have free, fair and credible elections conducted, they imbue the government with legitimacy garnered by the consent of the people.

When there are credible elections, the citizens will appreciate the values of democracy. Elections in Nigeria have witnessed the impositions of wrong candidates on the people's right to choose candidates of their choice, absence of leadership responsiveness, accountability and legitimacy and lack of people's participation. These other factors have raised agitations for a truly independent electoral body that will help reduce fraudulent acts in elections to its barest minimum.

Following the rejection of the 2007 elections results, election petition tribunals were created with the sole responsibility to examine election petitions and give verdict to same. Unfortunately, the tribunals have not been able to meet desired goals, although they have witnessed some success stories like removing a wrong candidate who assume leadership position dubiously and install the right candidate. Example can be drawn from the case of states like Rivers, Edo, Anambra and Ekiti States.

Since 1964, electoral malpractice has been a threat to democracy and since politicians are not brought to book in their previous manipulations of elections, the future politicians keep re-strategizing manipulations for subsequent elections, thereby making electoral malpractice inevitable in Nigerian politics.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

All levels of government, political parties and other election stakeholders must display unequivocal commitment toward credible elections and democratic consolidation. In order to reduce this menace there is need for legal restriction on these politicians who perpetrate this ugly art. Candidates or group of persons who assume political positions via electoral malpractice and are proved guilty by the election tribunal, will not only be nullified of their candidature, relinquish their positions but also fired. The former president of Nigeria in the second republic (Alhaji Shehu Shagari) was banned from participating in politics for embezzlement of public fund. For stability or sustainable democracy to be fully experienced in Nigeria, there should be reforms in the electoral system like imposing fine on the person or persons in some cases where they have illegally occupied such positions, suspend unscrupulous politicians from politics, since they thwart the efforts of patriotic Nigerians in stabilizing democracy by indulging in various forms of electoral malpractice.

The nature of money politics should be reduced, if we want to attain democratic stability in the country. The financial stakes in an election these days have gone to the level that only those who tasted power previously or work in the government for so many years and accumulated more money are capable of backing their political claims, rendering the "not too young to run" bill of the present administration null and void, as billions are spent to win elections.

Forums have to be created to re-orient the electorate on the need to enhance political culture that will help to eradicate all forms of electoral malpractice, taking into consideration the ugly effects it has on our politics and society at large. We are in desperate need of credible elections that will install a candidate and a government that is legitimate, as when this is done, the electorate will accept the principles and values of democracy which will in turn institutionalize democratic stability. Nigeria is ours and we must do everything to protect her interest.

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