

# Electoral Malpractices in Nigeria; Civic Education as an Antidote

Ewuga, Lucky Ekka

*Department of Arts and Social Science Education, Faculty of Education, Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria*

**Abstract—** Nigeria as a nation has been bedeviled long enough by political instability fueled largely by crisis in her electoral process and in specific, electoral malpractices. With decades of Nigeria's existence as a sovereign state, her political as well as electoral processes have been characterized at different level of political participation by incident of political thuggery, chaos, militarization, violence, votes' manipulation, unending law suits and crisis of legitimacy. It is in this content that this paper explains the extent to which civil education could be used in introducing the citizens at young age, to basic rules, institutions, practices and principles of democratic political system, in view of reducing or eradicating electoral malpractice from the Nigerian political system. In this context, the following recommendations were made: That a broad curriculum for civic education should be developed by educational stakeholders to include the identified problems herein; That government at all levels should set out on rigorous periodical campaigns on such policies and activities that will enhance participation of majority of the citizens in democratic process by encouraging civic education; That Civil societies as well as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) should complement the activities of government in promoting civic knowledge acquisition among the citizenry for better actualization of genuine democracy and overall development national development; The National Orientation Agency should embark on mounting civic education programmes before elections in the country; The government should establish a competent electoral offences tribunal, task with the responsibility of criminal prosecution of electoral offenders and lastly, reorientation of values in our society remains a task that must be done by stakeholders

**Key words—** Election, Electoral Malpractice, Nigeria, Political system, Civic Education and Antidote.

## I. INTRODUCTION

One of the critical and prominent features of any meaningful democracy accepted all over the world is the conduct of acceptable, credible, free and fair elections. Reason being that, concrete and stable political development as well as electoral system which call forth sustenance of democracy is determined by free and fair election.

Not only, is election one of the major elements of electoral process which must be conducted in a free and fair atmosphere, it is the only legitimate way of choosing representatives in any democracy. While electoral results must reflect the wishes of the people. Nigeria's experience in this regard had since independence been contrary to the above expectation. Obviously, wining at all cost becomes the norm. All forms of illegal and violent acts to overcome political opponents are let loose on the polity.

For a nation's democratic system to flourish and survive, its citizens must possess require skills values, attitude, manifest same in their daily activities and understand the basic features and principles of a democratic political system, so access same, when their interests are at stake, and must be willing to participate in local and national politics. Citizens can only gain those necessary knowledge, skills, values for stable and effective democracy through civic education. Hence, this paper is to examine the extent to which civic education can serve as an attitude to electoral malpractices with the main aim of preventing, controlling and reducing or eradicate it.

### A. Election

Undoubtedly, the foundational base of any democratic political system, whether fragile or established is election. It can simply be seen as the most critical; and visible means through which all citizens can peacefully choose or remove their leaders. In the words of Powel, (2000) elections are the principal instrument that compel or encourage the policy makers to pay attention to citizens.

Election is seen as the act of selecting someone or something through vote; the exercise of deliberate choice (Word Web, 2007). Uduma and Emerole, (2015) opines that elections is the platform of attaining leadership positions in democratic governance. Nnoli, (2003) sees election as the manner of choice agreed upon by a group of people out of many to occupy one or a number of positions of authority. Election being the only legitimate way of choosing representatives in any democracy, winning at all cost becomes the norm. All forms of violent arts to out-wit political opponents are let loose on the polity. Election as one major element of electoral process must be conducted in a free and fair atmosphere, while electoral results must show clearly crystals, the interest of the people, politically. Since independence, Nigeria experiences in this regard had since been contrary to this expectation.

Human factors such as undue influence of people, vote buying, impersonation and bribery as well as inadequate election materials, closing polling station before time and thuggery are some elements of electoral malpractices (while, 1996) and (Kenya, 2007). Over the period of Nigeria's existence as independence state, all these, characterized her electoral and political processes and it clearly define electoral malpractice

### B. Electoral Malpractices in Nigeria

In any objective political arrangement all over the world, election through the ballot boxes is recognized as the only credible barometer to determine power equation. However, Nigeria and Nigerians are today faced with the problem of choosing leaders at different level of government through a free and fair election. Uduma and Emerol, (2015) noted that in general, every election that is contested either in the developed democracies or third world etc. under one party system, two party systems or multi-party system, must have some element of malpractices or fraud. However, the degree and variation of these malpractices differ from one democratic setting to another.

Electoral malpractice according to Samuel, (2014) is a process by which the rules and regulation that govern the conduct of election are manipulated to favour specific interests. Bamisaye and Awofeso, (2011) defines electoral malpractices as the reflect determination of politicians, political actors and political parties to capture power by all means and at all cost. Thus, electoral malpractice is peculiar not only to Nigeria alone, but the historical trajectories of electoral process in Nigeria, shows pervasive struggle to control the electoral apparatus for self purpose as the process is characterized by:

- Intimidation of voters
- Partisanship by electoral offices
- Under age voting and impersonation
- Diversion of electoral materials
- Theft of ballot boxes etc.

Electoral malpractices therefore are common feature with all the elections conducted in Nigeria. Here is a summary of happening in Nigeria past elections in a bid to drive home these assertions.

MAMSER, (1987), though the Political Bureau report confirmed that before independences in 1960, Nigeria, which existed as the amalgamation of two protectorates (North and South) Since 1914 had already witnessed three different elections. The September, 1923 election in Lagos and Calabar, following the introduction of Clifford constitution of 1922 was the first one. In the election three seats for Lagos legislative council was won by the Nigeria National Democratic party led by the Herbert Macaulay while the Calabar Improvement League won the only seat for Calabar. The second election was an indirect system based on Sir Arthur Richards constitution in 1946. And the third election was regarded as the general election following Sir John Macpherson constitution in 1959. The election ushered in Nigeria's political independence, as it was held in 312 single member constituencies nationwide. The first election after independence in 1960 was the general elections in 1964. It is perhaps arguably true to say that outright malpractices of elections in Nigeria began with that particular election.

The NPC being the party controlling the central government influenced the arbitrary abductions, arrest, detention and intimidation of opponents. Evidence of this was submitted to the president by UPGA demanding for the postponement of the elections, but the government refused. Despite the boycott of the elections by UPGA, the Nigeria National Democratic Party (NNDP), without the participation of oppositions, claimed victory in the West and forcefully remained amidst crisis having perfected its, rigging strategies (Gboyega et'al, 1989).

The September, 1978 elections was not different from the other ones, as it is characterised with ethnic colouration of the parties, regional politics and unhealthy political parties rivalry. The 1983 elections result indicates that the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) had transformed itself into a 'super power', as other parties alleged the process was massively rigged with Shehu Shagari of the NPN emerging winner again.

The June 12, 1993 election was an election that promises to erase the ghosts of ethnicity, religious and political intolerance, which had for so long haunted the Nigeria political space. The adjudged freest and fairest election in Nigeria was declared inconclusive as M.K.O Abiola, the candidate of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) was adjudged the winner. The 1999 General elections was more of a transition from the military to the civilian government with three political parties: Alliance for Democracy (AD), All people party (APP) and the People Democratic Party (PDP) the results indicated that PDP had more national spread by winning 21 states across the country.

However, 2003, 2007 general election raised a fresh issue of concern and opened another chapter in the arrays of electoral malpractice in Nigeria as international community described these elections as the ones with the highest record of election malpractices (Ebirim, 2013). The 2003 elections was faced with growing anxiety for winning through monetary inducement, a process nationally described as 'Ghana must-go' politics (Aroge, 2012).

The 2007 elections was also marked with a lot of malpractices. Many of the election outcomes were challenged in the law court, many of which were overturned while fresh elections were declared in other states. The 2011 as well as the 2015 elections were not different from that of 2007 as they were characterized with the same form of electoral misconduct. The elections ushered in the late Yar'Adua, Goodluck Jonathan and Buhari into office respectively.

The last elections conducted February/May, 2019 were also marked by incident of pervasive threats and intimidation of political opponents at the polling centres, money was freely used in order to influence voters' choice of candidates, interception of ballot boxes and election result enroutes to collation centres, etc. The elections now in Nigeria, can be describe as a tussle between those already in the circle and those who wish to join the in the circle using political parties

as instrument. Both groups, in the course of this struggle, employed different means; ranging from ballot snatching, violence, god fatherism, among others, thereby creating tension and large room for election malpractices. Electoral malpractices have been a clog to the wheel of good governance. It is central to numerous socio-political problems facing many states, and Nigeria in specific, which if not curtailed, will destroy the foundation of fragile Nigerian democracy.

### C. Civic Education: The Antidote

In every democratic setting, for its democratic principles and political system be sustained, the citizens must be willing and able to participate in local and national politics. They must also possess the knowledge, skills and values that are considered necessary for a stable and effective democracy. How then can citizen acquired this knowledge, skills and values? The answer is through Civic Education. It is a process with which, to jump start the acquisition of the much needed process of political socialization (Aroge, 2012). Through civic education, the citizens can become properly informed about rights and obligations including participation in installing government. Hence, the following constitute the main focus of civic education.

- To introduce citizens to the basic rules and institutional features, principles and practices of democratic political system.
- To transmit a specific set of values such as political tolerance, trust in the democratic process, respect for the rule of law, and compromise, and to encourage responsible and informed political participation.

Civic education remains an important means of teaching the citizens about rights and what duties and responsibility the governed and leaders should do. The introduction of civic education as a subject to be taught in primary and secondary schools in Nigeria is expected to further deepen democratic culture and encourage qualitative participation of the average Nigerian in the governance process. The large job of educating citizens so that they can take responsibility for their roles within democratic state and exercise their right as free human beings, is covered by the term civic education. Civic education seeks to make people powerful and capable of participating to the fullest in a democratic society and create a democratic society (Branson, 1998). Civic education involves exposing students to central and political traditions of the nation and teaching them moral sentiments (Janowitz 1994, quoted in Kanaev, 2000). Levis, (2008) opines that civic education is the cultivation of virtues, knowledge, skills and experience necessary for political participation in a democratic society and the sustenance of democracy. Dushanbe, (2007), Olibie and Akudolu, (2008) viewed civic education as an essential part of education and an essential process for social and democratic development as it equips the people with acceptable standards, morals and a comprehension of how democratic institutions functions.

Civic education creates political awareness. It seeks to organize people politically, for example, through public interest or reform groups or through trade or professional sodalities (Finkel, 2002; Crittenden and Levine, 2013). Peterson, (2011) perceived civic education as first, a formative enterprise, second, it teaches the citizens the cognizance, skills or dispositions required for citizenship.

Democracies are sustained and or sustainable by citizens who have the requisite knowledge, skills and dispositions. Civic education, therefore, should be a prime concern of any democratic society involving all its citizens, as the scope of civic education covers contemporary issue on governance and liberal democratic principles.

### D. Scope and Components of Civic Education

The scope of civic education covers contemporary issues on governance and the promotion of liberal democracy. It covers the issues that plague society and bring discomfort and misery to human beings. More so, it covers issues such as natural disasters, drug abuse, cultism, human trafficking, drug trafficking, environmental problems (flood, erosion, and desertification), poverty, kidnapping, and other anti-democratic processes. Civic education is deeply concerned with democracy and promotion of good and civil governance. Therefore, political participation, popular participation of citizens in the affairs of the state is of concern to civic education. The core concern of civic education is explicably to inculcate the components of civic education such as civic knowledge, skill and disposition on the students for them to have a better understanding of citizens for leadership and good governance, with emphasis on elections and leadership selection, as well as advocating for unbiased, free and fair elections as a means to social stability and good governance. Hence, the general norm of civic education, which is vested on good governance and its appurtenances, namely, accountability, due process and transparency. However, Alexander (2012) observed that students are not properly taught the values that are necessary for national development. Civic education is an important tool for nation building, national consciousness, national integration and national unity; however, with the dwindling leadership, political and selfless resolve it would be agreed that the Scope of Civic Education in Nigeria still remains a script yet to be acted.

### E. Relevance of Civic Education

In an infant democratic setting like Nigeria, the relevance of civic education cannot be over-emphasized as government cannot survive in its policies towards achieving sustainable development without adequate civic educational programme being put in place to guide the citizens. For through civic education, individuals become responsible and discipline members of their communities. This ultimately promotes good governance and national development. Hence, the relevance of civic education includes:

- i. *Political Knowledge*: Through civic education, people would gain knowledge about politics and governance and become responsive and responsible citizens in the society know why they should. Civic education, therefore, is a sine qua non to the realization of national development in all its ramifications.
- ii. *Political Participation*: Political apathy is the opposite of political participation. Some see voting as a waste of time and resources as they believed that leaders always emerged by rigging and undue influence.  
Collective participation, democratic should not be seen as a dirty game therefore and left in the hand of few selfish individuals. Civic education, therefore, will help erase or reduce all manners of political apathy and enhance citizenship participation in governance through appropriate orientation.
- iii. *Political Efficacy*: Efficacy is seen, according to Wordweb dictionary (2007) as the capacity or power to produce a desired effect. Civic education, if properly organized, would make politics and political participation to be efficacious in the lives of people.
- iv. *Democratic Values*: Democratic system of government is no doubt a distinct system with peculiar norms and values. For the installation and survival of democracy, such values include the rule of law, fundamental human right, equal opportunities for and could all, among others, be inculcated through civic education as a segment of Adult Education.

## II. RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the position of this paper therefore, the following recommendations are made: that a broad curriculum for civic education should be developed by educational stakeholders to include the identified problems herein.

That government at all levels should set out on rigorous periodical campaigns on such policies and activities that will enhance participation of majority of the citizens in democratic process by encouraging civic education.

That Civil societies as well as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) should complement the activities of government in promoting civic knowledge acquisition among the citizenry for better actualization of genuine democracy and overall development national development.

The National Orientation Agency should embark on mounting civic education programmes before elections in the country. The government should establish a competent electoral offences tribunal, task with the responsibility of criminal prosecution of electoral offenders and lastly, reorientation of values in our society remains a task that must be done by stakeholders.

## III. CONCLUSION

It is certain that Nigerians desire democracy above any form of authoritarianism, but their perception of democracy and even the way in which it operates are distorted by numerous socio political factors one of which is electoral malpractice. Hence, solutions towards electoral malpractice as a problem in Nigeria democratic system must be sought at the level of political institutions and the level of individual citizens. At individual level, political office holders should be made accountable to the people they represent; regular forum of interactions should be organized between the people and their representatives at the various levels. At the masses level, more political awareness and education is needed to transform the people into democratic citizens, whereby they can stand up for their rights against the government, including demanding for accountability. In view of the above therefore, the needs to embrace civic educational and awareness programmes that could create in them necessary knowledge, skills, ideas right attitude and values that would allow a participatory governance to bring about desired socio-political and economic progress have been isolated. This part has been restated as the basis for national democratic well-being in the nation's polity and to guide the citizens against misrule in the art of governance. To achieve this, all important objective, civic education continues to be a-must-do programme in the country's national life.

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