

Elections and Human Security: The Nigeria Experience

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Abstract

Since the attainment of political independence in 1960 and the return to democracy in 1999, elections in Nigeria have remained a security threat. These ranges from loss of lives, carting away of ballot boxes and other election materials, use of thugs to disrupt election and harassing political opponents, shootings and killings have been common features of elections. The saying and assertion that election could be free, fair and credible have been in doubt. This paper examines election and security challenges in previous elections in Nigeria and also proffers positive solutions on how to conduct future elections without threat to people's lives and properties. The specific objective of the study is to unravel the challenges of human security on future elections in Nigeria by providing level playing ground where citizens are free to participate without threat to their lives. The theoretical framework of choice in this study is the human security theory which was expounded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in the year 1994. Data were collected through secondary sources while historical and descriptive methods were used in its analysis. My findings is that over-zealousness and over ambition of our politicians are responsible for human insecurity in our elections. We recommend that political positions should be made less attractive so as to reduce do or die tendencies.

Keywords: Election, Security, Nigeria, Challenges, Political positions.

INTRODUCTION

Electoral security challenges have been a major problem to the conduct of free, fair and credible elections in Nigeria. This has taken several dimensions including shootings in elections, resurgence of armed gangs, carting away of ballot boxes, buying of votes, arms race in the electoral process, gangsterism, thuggery, assassination of political opponents or oppositions and hooliganism (Olurode, 2013).

Meanwhile, electoral processes are conceived as a means of peaceful leadership changes. It is a means of actualizing the true democratic system of governance that exposes

electorates and aspirants to an experience, competitive power or leadership changes through balloting.

In other words, the electoral process empowers citizens to choose among the contestants their true representative and promote or encourage a participatory government. But misconduct of electoral system in Nigeria disrupts a peaceful process and created dissent among the stakeholders.

The country transited from military rule to civilian rule in 1999 without a genuine constitutional framework and public debate on how the country should be governed. The citizens cast their ballots without knowing the kind of power their elected representatives would exercise, or how various levels of government would interact and share power, or better still, knowing how long their elected officials would serve in their various offices. Right from the voters' registration, parties registration, screening of political aspirants, party congresses and conventions, political campaigns and rallies, election, etc the candidate's credentials or manifestos did not matter. Rather, it is the aspirants' veracity for deployment of thugs, powerful associates and perpetration of electoral violence and fraud that did matter. This has been so endemic that electorates have found it difficult to vote for their candidates on merit.

The implications of these are illegal arms and weapons in the criminal activities. That is,

the available resources that are meant for development projects are spent on electoral and political violence. Albert (2013:1) states that:

Nigeria transited from military dictatorship to multiparty democracy 29 May, 1999.

The country has been bedeviled by various forms of violent social conflict since then. Thousands of people were maimed, lost their lives and displaced from their communities as a result of these problems. Some of the conflict had their roots in the past historical circumstances of the concerned communities. Some others were

"manufactured" by elite seeking to stretch the liberty inherent in the new democratic process in Nigeria, so as to break, if not absurd. All these conflict have continued to constitute a recurrent destabilizing factor and a serious impediment to the survival of democratic transition and constitute insecurity in the country.

During the electoral processes in Nigeria, voters' registration has always been logistically problematic and hampered the process and efforts of electorates. Shortages of materials, delays in the opening of registration centres, poorly trained officers, and attempts by political party agents to manipulate the process have been among the problems. The official registered voters most times exceed the reliable estimated eligible voters. Such poor registration exercise creates opportunities for fraud.

Nigeria's politicians seem not believe in the context of oath, mandate and the rule of law. To them, elections mark the end of the role people have to play in politics. After all the elected representatives are the leviathans to which the people have mortgaged their freedom and rights. The elected politicians urge the people to shut up. Some of the politicians claim that they bought their votes; therefore, they are not liable or accountable to anybody.

Statement of the problem:

1. Overzealousness of the politicians to manipulate the electoral process to their own advantage is seen as the major problem of this study.
2. Corruption. the independent national electoral commission officials compromise their position by selling the ballot papers to the politicians who later stay at their private homes to manipulate and change the figures of the election to their own advantage.
3. There is always fear and panic in the polity whenever election comes up and in particular the problem it has created towards evolving a true democracy in which the wishes of the people could be allowed to prevail untampered by the elite whose political interests are often paramount.

Objectives of the study:

The main objective of this study is to unravel the challenges of human security on future elections in Nigeria by providing conducive environment where citizens will be free to participate in election without threat to their lives. Other specific objectives are;

- To ascertain whether contestants will be discouraged if political position will be made less attractive
- There is need for the government to make political positions less attractive so as to discourage contestants from perceiving it as a do or die affair.
- To strengthen electoral laws that will persecute electoral offenders/violators and jail the guilty to serve as a deterrence to others.

Methodology:

This paper adopted the historical research method. This simply implies that the study was based on the data, facts, information and even opinions that were gathered through secondary sources. The paper was enriched through textual materials including journals and seminar papers.

Simple analytical and descriptive historical methods were used in the analysis.

Theoretical framework:

There are competing, explanations and theoretical framework in the study of elections, security challenges and development in Nigeria. Most of these theories such as the conflict theory, the elite theory, the functionalist theory etc are useful for electoral and security studies but particularly inadequate to account for the changing realities of the dynamics of election induced insecurity particularly with direct effects on both human existence and the entire social system. This has made necessary for a theoretical framework that links the dynamics of election to human security critical.

The human security theory is the most plausible framework for this study. This is informed by the citizenry (Diamond, 1997). the human security theory interrogates the extent liberal democracy is achieving such feat particularly at the individual level (Klare, 1996). This is equally important because democracy and elections are framed around human political behaviour and interactions, This theory was propounded by the United

Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in the year 1994. They argued that human security is fundamentally concerned with human life and dignity.

Conceptual clarification:

Election:

Election in the democratic societies is generally conceived as a means of peaceful changes in leadership, which can be defined as a process of actualizing the true democratic system of governance.

Anyanor, Nwogu and Nwogu (2010:13) views election as a method and process of choosing candidates into elective positions.

Human security:

Human security denotes actions and steps taken to secure the lives of human beings.

According to Hussein, Gnisci and Wanjiru (2004) human security is seen as all encompassing condition in which people and communities live in freedom, peace and safety, participate fully in the governance of their own country, enjoy the protection of fundamental rights, have access to resources and basic necessities of life and inhabit an environment which is not determined to their health and wellbeing.

Security:

According to Ezeah, and Osaji (2014). security can be conceptualized as the knowledge and attitude members of a society possess regarding the protection of their lives and properties. **Literature review:**

Electoral security is sine qua non to peaceful, credible, free and fair election in Nigeria. This is because without the protection of lives and properties during election no success will be recorded. The key point here is that security is key to a hitch free election and could systematically create to a large extent the desired fair playing ground for political office seekers.

Jega (2006) contends that "election creates an avenue for competitive quest for elective offices, Igine (2013), provided some theoretical conception of elections and argued that election security is integral to the integrity of the overall conduct of elections including the electorates, electoral personnel, election materials, contestants, election monitors, observers and other stakeholders who participate in the electoral process. On his part, Alapiki (2000), argued that the abuse of incumbency power has been a major trigger of electoral insecurity.

In other words of Olurode and Haamanga (2013) electoral security constitute an integral element of the success of elections and represent an advance on electoral reform agenda in which

the safety of the electorates are guaranteed before, during and after elections. This has given rise to the need for a critical re-engagement with electoral system in Nigeria beyond voting and being voted for in elections.

Importantly, a genuine election is a political competition that takes place in an environment characterized by confidence, transparency and accountability and that provides voters with an informed choice between district political alternatives (Mbah and Obi, 2014:3). Therefore, a genuine democratic electoral process presupposes respect for

freedom of expression and free press, the right to vote and be voted for at elections. freedom of assembly and movement, freedom of association. non-discrimination and equal rights for all citizens, freedom from intimidation, and a range of other fundamental human rights and freedoms.

Section 33 — 46 (chapter iv) of 1999 Nigerian Constitution as amended, specify these rights expressively. Section 14 of the 1999 constitution specifies the importance of election to democracy. The nexus between elections and human rights underlie the fundamental dignity of beings in the process of choosing who governs him and the type of liberty or freedom he may enjoy during the regime's reign.

Election, therefore, represents a modern and universally accepted process in which individuals are openly and methodically chosen to represent a body or a community in a large entity or government (Nnadozie, 2007:45). It has become one of the cardinal characterizations of modern democracy. It is only through electoral process that representative democracy can be practiced. Without adhering to the electoral laws and processes, democracy cannot be practiced or institutionalized. It is because of the importance of elections in the democratic process that any problem associated with the electoral process has direct impact on the democratic institutions and freedom enjoyed in any democratic set up.

To vote is an act or a process of making a choice or decision on a matter by means of voting and this is expressed on ballot paper or other options in which choice is expressed. In this context. voting can be expressed as the right to make a choice or decision in political elections regarding candidate for political offices. So, voting expresses the actual making of rational decisions in choosing between alternatives candidates who are contesting political offices. There can be no elections without voting and there can be no voting without election. In both, a choice is expressed. An election is one of the means by which a society may organize itself and make specific formal decision, and where voting is free, it acts simultaneously as a system for making certain decisions regarding the power relations in a society, and a method for seeking political obedience with a minimum of sacrifice of the individual's freedom.

Since democracy implies majority rule, it also involves respect for fundamental rights of the people. Thus, Nzongola-Ntaleja (2004: 14), explains democracy as a continuous process of promoting equal access to fundamental rights, because democracy has election as an important aspect, it then touches on the delicate issues of expressing rights in choosing or electing public office holders.

Democracy entails a way of life, goal, ideal and philosophy which guarantees freedom of the majority and the rights of the minority (Oddih. 2007: 148).

Thus, democracy which embodies such elements as election has several different contemporary usages such as;

- i. A form of government in which the right to make political decisions is exercised directly by the whole body of citizens. acting under procedures of majority rule, usually known as direct democracy.
- ii. A form of government in which the citizens exercise the same right not in person but through representative chosen by and responsible to them, known as representative democracy.
- iii. A form of government, usually a representative democracy, in which the powers of the majority are exercised within a framework of constitutional restraints designed to guarantee all citizens the enjoyment of certain individual or collective rights such as

freedom of association. freedom of speech known as liberal or constitutional democracy (Gwinn and Norton. 1992:29). This is so hence the ultimate goal of democracy is to minimize arbitrary and tyrannical rule and to examine a pattern of civility rooted in respect and justice for man to achieve a human policy.

For election to be free and fair there must be an honest, competent, non-partisan administration to run elections, enabling rules and regulation — electoral laws. a developed system of political parties, and an independent judiciary to interpret electoral laws. However, both the electoral body and judiciary are partisan in Nigeria because they appear to be selectively applying the law. As such the prevailing climate of impunity in Nigeria seems to be the biggest single obstacle to ending abuses of human rights.

Thus, radical scholars see democracy as practiced in liberal states as a shackled democracy. This is because the bourgeois class in these liberal states dominates and exploits the working class who constitute the majority. The major tenet and belief of the Marxist theory of democracy is that social equality and absence of economic exploitation is the yardstick for determining genuine democracy. Political equality presupposes sufficient social and material equality to enable contending groups to utilize formal political rights in roughly the same degree where sharp social and material inequalities exist. The provision of equal political rights confers a major advantage on those who command greatest resource to mobilize in defense of their interest (Parkin, cited in Oddih, 2007: 152), it is from the foregoing analysis that we agree with the Marxist explanation of democracy that an equalitarian society needs to emerge as an existing ideal and principles of democracy that can ensure justice, peace, freedom and civil liberties.

Legal equality of all elections or voters exists in conjunction with their freedom to choose which of the political candidates would represent them. As Nnoli notes, "this historical and worldwide significance of elections for human progress does not necessarily mean that in every country elections adequately reflect these traits of democracy, or contribute to material and socio-political well-being of the masses of the population. In Nigeria, therefore, the history of elections has not really expressed that the masses can look forward to them as a significant force in changing the material conditions of their existence or change the experience of previous military regimes in restoring their civil and political rights. This is because the moral values of Nigerians are corrupted by the blatant disregard of laws and constitutional order.

In whatever context that the process of election is used, it implies that each voter exercises his or her right to choose independently of any other voters, it expresses the divergent views of voters on issues, policies and programmes of political parties and candidates for election. Therefore, election implies an element of choice expressed in voting in selecting either a number of candidates or a range of programmes.

Although elections make provisions for the masses to express themselves over the conduct of public officials who have been in power, they do not guarantee the masses of direct future events or guarantee them access to decision-making. That is why Joseph (1992: 155) aptly describe Nigerian elections as principally a competition for control of the electoral machinery. authoritarianism is a tactical instrument for retaining power. To be sure, the crop of civilian leadership who were formerly military officers has not been an asset to democratization and promotion of human rights in Nigeria. However, the electorates have not been freed from state repression and climate of intolerance. This is because elections in Nigeria have been compared to wars and wars have the imprints of

conflict which essentially involve both the police and the army and other security operations.

This 'war' was particularly visible in the expensive manner politicians prepare for elections and state power. It typifies itself in the primitive use of violence and utter disregard of the rule of the game of politics (Ibeanu, 2003). This primitive accumulation of votes is sustained by and often justified by the use of army, the police and other public and private security structures to support their course.

What really boggles our minds is whether actually choices are expressed in elections? And if not, why? This question has become necessary because voting which expresses the right to make a choice among competing candidates have become a mirage in Nigeria.

Challenges of electoral system in Nigeria:

During the electoral processes in Nigeria, voters' registration has always been logistically problematic and hampered the process and efforts of electorates. Shortages of materials, delays in the opening of registration centres, poorly trained officers, and attempts by political party agents to manipulate the process have been among the problems.

In the words of Albert (2001: 1), the official registered voters most times exceed the reliable estimated eligible voters. Such poor registration exercise creates opportunities for fraud. Nigeria's politicians seem not believe in the concept and context of oath, mandate and the rule of law. To them, elections mark the end of the role people have to play in politics. After all, the elected representatives are the leviathans to which the people have mortgaged their freedom and rights. The elected politicians urge the people to shut up. Some of the politicians claim that they bought their votes; therefore, they are not liable or accountable to anybody.

Furthermore, ethnic and personal loyalty rather than commitment to the people take control. Governance is therefore business, and a complex or medium for recouping money spent during the elections and for enrichment of the politicians. Akpan (2014) assert that "the low voter turnout in the national elections" candidates invest large amount of money are usually favoured. This largely influences who wins the elections. The electoral laws governing how parties secure and spend their funds are yet to be known or available, or have been ineffective, as there is lack of knowledge about them. Obe (2007) states that:

I have witnessed the erosion of democratic institutions during both the state and national elections. Both elections lacked organization, and demonstrated coercive practices and lack of transparency.

That was why, in the years following the end of military rule, Nigeria witnessed recurrent incidents of ethnic clashes, ethno-religious crisis, communal clashes, ethnic agitations and hatred, kidnapping, oil bunkering and pipeline vandalization as well political violence many of which manifested from electoral mis-conduct, constitutional flaws in government. Nigeria has had different histories of undemocratic national elections. Its 1999, 2003, and 2007 state and national elections were dogged by accusations of ballot snatching and brazen electoral rigging by domestic and international election observers. Both elections resulted in lengthy litigations by aggrieved losing candidates. Few of the losing candidates in gubernatorial and parliamentary elections won their mandate back through the judicial process, ethnic and religious crisis threaten the corporation of Nigerians, which are traceable to a widely held belief that the past elections have neither been free nor fair.

The way forward of future elections in Nigeria:

Elections must be totally free, fair, and credible if we must talk about true representative democracy in Nigeria. Free, fair and credible elections equally classify a country as politically developed or politically stable. Some of the features of free, fair and credible elections are as follows:

1. Voters must not be coerced or compelled to vote for a particular candidate, secret balloting solves this problem.
 2. Contestants and their political parties are allowed equal opportunity to campaign freely and openly.
 3. Only eligible voters are allowed to vote during elections.
 4. Judicial independence must be maintained during and after election, especially, on the interpretation of electoral laws.
 5. There should be periodic review of voters' register with a view to including names of voters who have reached the voting age and detecting names of deceased voters.
 6. There must be an independent, viable and unbiased electoral commission to conduct the election.
 7. The country should be properly divided into constituencies to avoid gerrymandering.
 8. There must not be delay' in announcing election results. and it must be announced by an honest election official recognized by the electoral law.
 9. There must be election laws to guide the conduct of the elections.
 10. Security must be provided during the election to protect election materials, voters and candidates.
- II. Candidates who are not satisfied with the outcome of the result should have the option of challenging the results in a Court of competent jurisdiction.

Conclusion:

Electoral processes are conceived as a means of peaceful leadership / chances in a democratic system of governance and leaders should see themselves as master-servants with the mandate of giving or rendering account of their stewardship to the electorate.

Moreover, Government need to make political positions less attractive so as to discourage contestants from perceiving it as a do or die affair which negates the spirit of sportsmanship which elections are meant to be. Security of lives and properties are paramount if Nigeria should make any success in the elections.

Recommendations

Based on this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Government should take pro-active steps to beef-up security in future elections in Nigeria where the electorate/citizens will be free to participate in elections without threat to their lives.

2. Electoral laws should be strengthened so that electoral offenders / violators will be prosecuted and those found guilty will be jailed to serve as deterrence to others.
3. Political positions should not be too attractive so as to discourage some people whose motive of going into politics is to embezzle public/tax payers money and also to reduce do or die tendencies.

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