

The Role of INEC(Independent National Electoral Commission) In Strengthening Nigeria Democracy Through Voting Behavior

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ABSTRACT

The paper accordingly aims to among other things investigate the roles played by the Independent National Electoral Commission, (INEC), in the mobilization of citizens for the General elections, the factors that induced citizens' participation as well as the level of conformity of the political behavior of the electorate with electoral guidelines. The paper also seeks to assess the extent to which participation and voting behavior contributed to the credibility and success of the polls. To achieve this aim, descriptive research design was used for the study. It was recommended that INEC should be able to provide quality voting equipment for the citizens of the Nigeria. INEC must be able to carry out free, fair and credible elections. The study concludes that effective political participation and the voting behavior of citizens tantamount the effectiveness of the political process and it is thus recommended amongst other things that for political stability to be maintained, the electoral process must be accommodating, and allow for expression of the electoral freedom of the people as well as giving cognizance to the socio-economic wellbeing of the people.

Keywords: *Democracy, Electorates, Electoral Freedom, Political Participation, Political stability, voting behavior*

INTRODUCTION

Background to the study

Going back to the history of political participation in Nigeria, is more than half a century of country's existence as a sovereign nation-state, the pre-independence 1959 general election to her independence in 1960, Nigeria has been struggling to install a viable and durable democracy but its dismal political actuality characterized by consistent inability to conduct credible and transparent elections in which its citizens have access to adequately enforced and effectively protected opportunities, to exercise their franchise in the choice of their leaders, has made the agenda of democratic sustainability largely a mirage. This accounts for the copious failed attempts at democratic transitions. For instance the collapse of the First and Second Republics and the annulment of the June 12, 1993 General Elections and the consequent abortion of the Third Republic [1].

The 1959 election was contested by the three major political parties of the first republic, namely, the NCNC (National Congress of Nigerian Citizens), the AG (Action Group) and the NPC (Northern Peoples Congress) in this election, each of the parties proved its strength in its home region, particularly in the ethnic area of its leadership and none was able to break in of the national arena. Such that none of them at the national level convincingly won the constitutional/electoral requirement to form an independent government a situation which led to the rickety coalitions between NPC and NCNC which had to collapse before the 1964 General election.

Apparently due to this experience no one political party ventured to go into the 1964 General election alone. This some emergency and make –shift alliances had to be formed for the purpose of that election. In the end, two alliances were formed namely, the Nigerian national Alliance (NNA) and the united progressive grand Alliance (UPGA) which contested the 1964 General election. The NNA was made up the NPC, NNDP, MDF (mid- west Democratic front) and NDC (Nigeria delta congress, among others, while the UPGA was made up of NCNC the rump of AG (which NCNC had earlier pointed NPC to destroy) and the Northern progressive element.

Before the election itself, NPC had manipulated the system disorganize the progressive elements in the North to put itself in a predominantly leading position there. As the NNDP was trying its hands on a similar practice in the Western Region, UPGA put its own hones in disarray by declaring a boy cot of the elections. The aftermath of this election, region further put a wedge between the political elites and brought the first republic to its knees. Thus the alliances not

withstanding ethnic sentiments were still appealed to in order to mobilize political support. For example. In the north the NPC still used its slogan of one north one people one Destiny” to win support for itself its home region while presenting the AG and the NCNC as foreign intruders that must not be trusted or supported. The NCNC in particular was presented as the Igbo machine to consolidate their economic domination of the North.

Concerning the Western Region the NNDP grew fast and became a party to beat in that region during the 1964 election became was argued chief S.L Akintola leader of the party appealed to Yoruba ethnic sentiments that the Igbo (their major rival in social and economic terms then) were trying to dominate the west through acquisition of political power there [2]. Among the Igbo of the Eastern Region the NCNC dominated the scene in that general election because that party (the NCNC) had always presented itself and was so seen as the defender of the Igbo interest in Nigeria politics.

Fast forward to the evolution of the fourth republic the military government in a bid to enthrone democratic government invited both international and local election monitoring group to observe the transitional electoral process. The observers agreed that the Abubakar’s administration gave a completely free hand to the independent national electoral commission (INEC) to conduit the elections. Former president Jimmy carter of the united state of America official from the commonwealth of nation and us social activist Jesse Jackson were among members of the monitoring team. The results of the presidential elections was announced and general Olusegun Obasanjo of people’s Demarcatic party (PDP) won the election while at the local government election of December 5 1998 the PDP and the APP each obtained 2590 of the votes of in twenty –four states including Abuja.

Since the country’s return to democratic rule in 1999, transitional elections in 2003, 2007 and 2011 were won and lost under conditions in which electoral malpractices, rigging and violence were pronounced, a phenomenon described by Dauda as “The Slippery side of landslide” [3].

Participation in Elections in Nigeria is characterized by machine politics which “involves the parceling out of parts of the State including territories to individuals, usually under the leadership of one or two notables ... who maintain their pre-bends essentially by force” [4]. Ibeanu further asserts that under such circumstances, elections give rise to the primitive accumulation of votes, which he refers to as the “winning of votes by both objective and structural violence and disregard for the rule of law” [4]. In this kind of environment, there is usually sustained rigging which ensures that votes do not count and voters are not counted [5], leading to the lack of credible elections.

There are definitely studies on elections in Nigeria especially since 1999, but this particular study is a focus on political participation and voting behaviour. Existing studies have been preoccupied with the history of elections, issues of electoral violence, the legal framework for election, the role of security agencies, electoral bodies, and electoral reforms thereby failing to empirically investigate into those factors that motivate voters to turnout at elections and their voting behaviour. This study aspires to fill the void by undertaking an empirical study of political participation and voting behaviour in the 2015 General Elections in Benue State of Nigeria.

Democracy had been argued to have advantage of providing for moderate change, hence it provide a better political framework for national development, the freedom of association and of expression and participation inherent in democracies are values in themselves s independent of their values as mean of attainment of other goal. Democracy can be deduced to mean the free expression and determinant by the people of a polity of how their society should be governed. The translation of this expression into action through appropriate policies and programmes is the function and indeed, the purpose of government. Thus, democracy is the essences of the social; contract between the people and the government. Once there is loss of faith in the social contacts, and the feedback mechanism between government and the people breakdown, democracy becomes only a process of meaningless ritual It (democracy) therefore encourage the development of the feedback process of information dissemination. In such a system the participatory role of the civil society is very crucial as it receives and digests political message from the government with variety outcome. Where the outcome are the expected ones the legitimacy and popular acceptance of the government is enhanced. However, where the outcomes are conflictual there are usually feedbacks to government through the media grapevines protest and or increased pressure group activities. These feedback which form part of fallouts from peoples participatory role are necessary to make government adjust particular policies (like in the case of fixing piles of petroleum products) to meet the expectations of the people. Democracy cans therefore only male sense to the ordinary people if they are activities participants in its processes, and if eventually they become better off through the implementation of concrete policies and programmes of genuinely democratic government.

On April 1, 2003, another election was conducted and this was once again won by President Olusegun Obasanjo and his vice-President Abubakar. The 2003 election as stated by Olamosu [6] were missilery rigged in an unprecedented manner ever in the history of elections in Nigeria unlike the 1999 presidential fraud that was swept under the carpet because two contenders were both from south-west part of Nigeria. The election of 2003 confirmed the fear of many

Nigeria and political parties that Dr. Abel Guobadia could not conduct free and fair elections because all along in the case of political process leading to the election proper he had exemplified his bias as a stooge in the hands of the party in power.

The general election of 2007 were held on April 1, 14 and 21 April 2007. Governorship and state Assembly election were held a week later on April 1,21,2007. Umar Yar'Adua and vice-president Good luck Jonathan of PDP won the election and were sworn in on may 2,2007 Election observers from the European union described the election as "the worst they had ever seen anywhere in the world" with rampant vote rigging, violence, theft of ballot boxes and intimidation.

Yar'Adua fell ill and was flown out of the country to Saudi Arabia for medical attention. He remained unwillingness to communicate for fifty (50) days and led to rumors about his death. This continued until the media (BBC) aired an interview via the telephone from the sickbed of the president in Saudi Arabia he was still abroad as at January 2010; and by early may 2010 Jonathan had been serving as the acting president in the absent of Yar'Adua finally died on may 5, 2010; and was succeed by Good luck Jonathan. This made Jonathan became the third president of the fourth republic.

On April 12, 2011 another election was conducted by INEC with Professor Attahiru Jega as its chair when the country embarked on the process of another general election there was so much concern expressed locally and internationally that the election would take Nigeria to the edge of the precipice. But after the conclusion of the 2011 election there was an outbreak of evidence in the twelve Northern states over the outcome of the presidential election Of April 6. Reports of election malpractices, protests about results in Ika North Anambra central plateau state, pre-election tension in Akwa Ibom Gubernatorial election in Imo state, and the heavy development of soldiers in the North, Delta state and Oyo state filled the air. The pervasive impression was that 2011 election was a huge improvement on previous elections in Nigeria.

The 2011 election was monitored by the European Union election observation mission. The elections marked an important improvement compared to all polls observed previously by the European Union in Nigeria. It is important to note that in all democracies political communication, which makes use of the media, has become apparently relevant. At every opportunity stakeholders intensively exploit political communication to win elections. In Nigeria also, where the media has gained control in creating political awareness among electorate, politicians ceaselessly use it for similar purpose.

Statement of the problem

In spite of the presence of the media in Nigeria, the level of political awareness among electorates seems very low. Majority of voters lack basic knowledge about the entire political process to take rational decisions on election matters. This manifest in their traditional voting pattern as they vote on the basis of party line, religion and ethnic ties rather than important issues that are critical to human existence. This investigation therefore seeks to determine the extent to which the media served as instrument in creating political awareness among Nigerian electorates during the 2019 general election in the fourth Republic and how it also portrayed Nigerian's image to the international community in the area of democratic culture through the electoral process as a way of enthroning political leaders in Nigeria as well as INEC in the country.

Objective of the study

The general objective of the study is to look at the roles of the media, voting behaviour and Independence electoral commission in strengthening the democracy in Nigeria. The specific objectives are:

- 1) To examine the roles of the media in creating political awareness
- 2) To determine the factors that influencing the voting behaviour of the electorates in strengthening the democracy in Nigeria
- 3) To examine the ways the media portrayed Nigeria's international image during and after the elections in terms of democratic culture and governance.
- 4) To suggest how Independence National Electoral Commission officials could be encouraged to exercise their voting rights even while carrying out their official duties/national assignment.

1.4 Research Questions

- 1) What role did the media play in creating political awareness?
- 2) What are the factors that influences the voting behaviour of electorates during general elections?
- 3) How did the media portray Nigeria's international image before and after the general election in term of democratic culture and government?
- 4) How did INEC encourage the citizens that, to vote for the rightful person is their right?

METHODOLOGY

The methodology by the researcher is purely qualitative. The study majorly rely on secondary source of data and the analysis of the data were from both the electronic and printed media, relevant journals, text books and other publications.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gurevitch and Blumler [7] describe the media as political institutions that are omnipotent and capable of being employed for manipulative purposes. Therefore, the media can be said to be the most effective means of achieving personal liberty and political emancipation. It can also be described as a mirror of the political, social and economic life of the country. It is also the duty of the media as an institution and guardian of the public to examine the political policies and programmes designed to educate, motivate, mobilize and manipulate the masses in to active participation in the political process. This is because the masses need to be mobilized, sensitized and manipulated to embrace and participate in the electoral process. As it is in all elections, there are always sentiments, violence, rancor, conflicts, uncertainty, intimidations and harassment from political party supporters, and sometimes, the masses are influenced with the excessive display of wealth by rich politicians political parties and actors so as to mobilize them for their egocentric motive has therefore become a decisive element in the political process” [8].

Election

Encyclopedia *Britannica*. Retrieved 18 August 2009. An election is a formal decision making process by which a population chooses an individual to hold public office. Elections have been usual mechanism by which modern representatives democracy has operated since the 17th century [9]. Elections may fill offices in the legislature, sometimes in the executive and judiciary and for regional and local government. This process is also used in much other private and business organization from clubs to voluntary associations and corporations. A the universal use of elections as a tool for selection representatives in modern’ democracy is in contract with the practice in the democratic archetype, ancient Athens. As the elections were considered an oligarchic institution and most political offices were filled using serration also known as allotment by which office hold were chosen by lot.

Electoral reform describes the process of introducing fair electoral systems where they are not in place or improving the fairness or effectiveness of existing systems. Nephrology is the study of results and other statistics relating to elections (especially with a view to predicting future results).

To elect means “to choose or make a decision and sometimes other forms of ballot such as referendums are referred to as elections especially in the United States. Elections were used as early in history as ancient Greece and ancient Rome, and throughout the medieval period to select velars such as the holy Roman emperor and the pope. The modern “election” which consists of public elections of government officials didn’t emerge until the beginning of the 17th century when the idea of representative government took hold in North America and Europe.

voting behaviour

The central hypothesis of Lazarsfeel et al. [10] was that the act of voting is an individual act, affected mainly by the personality of the voter and his exposure to the media.

This is because voting provides one of the richest sources of information about the interaction between individuals, society and politics. By investigating the mysteries of voting behaviour, we are thus able to learn important lessons about the nature of the political system, and gain insight into the process of social and political change [11].

Voting is one of the cardinal principles of the democratic system of government and the importance of political and election participations in democratic societies have increased dramatically.

This brings us to a sharper definition of voting; therefore, voting in this capacity refers to aggregating individual preferences into a collective decision in an election, the action of formally indicating one’s choice of candidate or political party at an election [12]. Voting denotes the means whereby a number of persons are enabled to indicate their agreement or disagreement with some prepositions or their preferences as between two or more proposals or between two or more candidates for some offices. It is therefore a means of aggregating individual preference into a collective decision. The term generally refers to the process by which citizens choose candidates for public office or decide political questions submitted to them.

According to Broomhead [13] as cited in Okolie [14], voting denotes the means whereby a number of persons are enabled to indicate their agreement or disagreement with some prepositions, or their preferences as between two or more proposals or between two or more candidates for some office. It is therefore a means of aggregating individual preference into collective decisions. As noted by Stokes [15] cited in Okolie [14], voting is not the sole means of aggregating

individual preferences; other means include market mechanisms and processes of informal interaction in many social and political groups.

Voting in elections into public offices is usually conducted using ballot boxes. Voting therefore takes the form of thumb printing in the ballot paper provided. Voting processes have undergone transformations over the year in Nigeria, from secret ballot system; the electoral commission experimented with open-ballot system, and modified open-secret ballot system [14].

The voting system varies from country to country but one basic point that underlie all voting in a given socio-formation is decision making. To vote is to make a decision about a particular issues or issues at stake. However, the direction of the decision is determined by certain factors which shape voting behaviour. Voting Behaviour according to connotes a collection of attitudes, values and beliefs in which individuals of a given society have towards elections both at the local, national and international level. While Harrop and Miller [16] using a constructivist paradigm, explained voting behaviour as a pattern of political participation mostly taking place in democratic societies where people react to certain laid down values, principles and beliefs how they choose their leaders. These set of beliefs could be based on age, sex, ethnicity, religion and education.

Democracy

This is a concept that could seen as everyday song because it has been variously defined by different scholars on different topics that has to do with grass-root governance, election and electoral process. Therefore is of no need over-flogging on this particular concept again. The only definition of democracy which will be considered here among many others is; Democracy is a system of government that empowers the electorates(masses) to hire and fire, in a free fair and credible election (which means a system of government that give electorates the mandate “*power*” to determine their representatives among many contestants by voting-“*hiring*”, and when such a representative failed, they still have the power of “*firing*” voting him/her out of office through the same process of voting. [17].

Roles of INEC

Major functions of INEC as contained in Section 15, Part 1 of the Third Schedule of the 1999 Constitution (As Amended) and Section 2 of the Electoral Act 2010 (As Amended) are stated below,

- 1) Organise, undertake and supervise all elections to the offices of the President and Vice-President, the Governor and Deputy Governor of a State, and to the membership of the Senate, the House of Representatives and the House of Assembly of each state of the federation;
- 2) Register political parties in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution and Act of the National Assembly;
- 3) Monitor the organisation and operation of the political parties, including their finances; conventions, congresses, and party primaries.
- 4) Arrange for the annual examination and auditing of the funds and accounts of political parties, and publish a report on such examination and audit for public information;
- 5) Arrange and conduct the registration of persons qualified to vote and prepare, maintain and revise the register of voters for the purpose of any election under this constitution;
- 6) Monitor political campaigns and provide rules and regulations which shall govern the political parties;
- 7) Conduct voter and civic education;
- 8) Promote knowledge of sound democratic election processes; and Conduct any referendum required to be conducted pursuant to the provision of the 1999 Constitution or any other law or Act of the National Assembly.

Theoretical framework

The research adopts the agenda setting theory and the voting behaviour theory as its theoretical framework. Agenda setting implies that mass media predetermines what issues are regarded as important at a give time in a society [18]. The theory according to Severing and Tankard [19] refers to the media ‘s capability (through repeated news coverage) or raising the importance of an issue in the mind of the public most of the time also, the agenda setting function is carried out through the process of gate- keeping Mcquail [20] describes a phenomenon which had long been noticed and studies in the context of election campaigns; and the main issues of the day, are reflected in what the public perceives as the main issues.

Agenda setting does not ascribe to the media the power to determine what we are thinking about. For instance, they set the agenda for political campaigns [18].

Significance of the Study

This study establishes the importance of the media in affecting the voting behaviour of people in the general elections, and also how the media as a medium of communication portrayed Nigeria's international image in the 2019 general elections.

The study will therefore be useful to politicians as it will educate them on how to use the media effectively to reach voters. This is because politicians spend a lot of money on advertising and campaign materials trying to win the votes of only a handful of the electorates. The majority of those who would vote always have their minds made up right from the moment electoral process is announced politicians therefore, labour so hard for the votes of minority elements in the population that easily could not make up their minds or might have one reason or the other to doubt a candidate along the line and sub-sequent might have to change their minds. It will also be useful to different media houses so as to know how to use the media to sensitize voters and to also portray Nigeria's image positively in the international community. Besides the research would be useful for stake holders, administrators, academic purposes as well, so as to know how to gather information and also to understand the behavioural pattern of voters during elections.

CONCLUSION

These research carefully examined and appraised the voting behaviour and the roles of Independence National Electoral Commission for strengthening of democracy in Nigeria with reference to 2019 general election. Based on the analysis of the data collected to answer the research question, it was concluded that voting behaviour has significant effect on the citizen participation in Nigeria government and politics. This participation faces some challenges such as problem of inadequate election materials, money bag politics, intimidation and harassment of opponents, snatching of electoral material, rigging of election results, lack of voting orientation, among others.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made;

- i. There should be a elimination or reduction in the level of money bag politics in the system.
- ii. There should be good and quantity equipment for running of the election.
- iii. The salaries and allowances of the political office holders should be reduced by placing them on national minimum scale based on their certificate/ academic qualification so as to make public offices less financially attractive to politicians.
- iv. There should be introduction and implementation of independent candidature to allow electorates have chance of elected credible, competent and accountable candidates.
- v. INEC should check mate the level of party's financial commitment and spending on political campaign.
- vi. INEC should come out with a specific amount for the purchase of nomination and interest/intention form in order to allow the competent but poor people to contest and rough shoulder with power of incumbency based on the masses choice.

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