

## **Electoral Frauds and Challenges of Good Governance in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

This paper examined the impact of electoral fraud on good governance in Nigeria. Electoral fraud which is seen as electoral malpractice is the failing of all electoral institutions to conduct elections in a manner that provides equal opportunity for all citizens to participate actively in choosing their leaders. Secondary sources of data collection was adopted. The study however identified the various forms of manifestation of electoral fraud in Nigeria to include vote buying, intimidation, ballot box snatching, under age voting/multiple voting, bribery/corruption, falsification of results, misinformation, diversion of electoral materials among others. The paper also revealed the major cause of this violations of the peoples right to choose their leaders to include desperation among the politicians and abject poverty in the country. The paper therefore argued that electoral fraud impacts negatively on good governance as it hinders operations of rule of law, public participation in decision making process, transparency and accountability, equity and inclusiveness in the conduct of public affairs. The paper therefore recommended for the strengthening of public institutions and rule of law which is the hallmark of any democratic government.

**Keywords:** Electoral fraud, Good governance, Election, Democracy

## **1. ELECTORAL FRAUD AND CHALLENGES OF GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA**

Democracy means a system of government which is based on popular election and representation. This means that the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised directly by them through their elected representatives. According to Abraham Lincoln democracy means government of the people by the people and for the people. This means the supremacy of the people, effective representation and popular participation of all adult citizens in choosing whoever that represents them in a periodic, free, fair, and transparent election.

In view of the above, democracy is unthinkable without a free and transparent election where the citizens exercise their franchise in order to elect their leaders. According to Baidoo, Dankwa and Eshun (2018) one of the pillars that support every democracy all over the world is election. To them it helps to stabilize the democratic process as it places the power to govern others with the people. According to Gwinn and Norton (1992) in Oddih (2007) election is the formal process of selection of a person for public office or accepting or registering a political proposition by voting. To Eya (2003) election is the selection of a person or group of persons for office through ballot and making choice as between alternatives. Yusuf and Zaheruddin (2016) however posited that elections have not only become an instrument for the demise of authoritarianism or a transition to democracy but the credibility of the electoral process has equally become the instrument for any democratic regime. With this therefore, elections provides the citizens the opportunity to take part in governance.

Since power resides with the people in any democratic system, the people however use elections to evaluate how leadership or governance has excelled in the areas of education, health, economy, agriculture, standard of living of the people. In view of this, Baidoo, Dankwa and Eshun (2018) pointed out that election is the cardinal process through which power is allocated, and a means through which representative democracy is attained.

To Ewuim (2014) election helps the people not only to choose credible leaders freely but it provides the opportunity to change an unpopular government. She further posits that election provides an avenue for testing the acceptability and popularity of their policies. Persson and Tabellini (2000) however, posited that it help the citizens to aggregate their preferences, by

selecting credible office holders and as well provide incentives to politicians to act in the interest of those who voted in an election.

However, in Nigeria the conduct of elections and what this represents falls short of the expectations of the ordinary people in the society. This is because the conduct of elections have been plagued with so many electoral frauds which ranges from vote buying, intimidation, multiple voting, low voter education, snatching of ballot boxes, violence, weak institutions. The above situation refers to illegalities committed by government officials in charge of the conduct of elections, political parties, individuals or groups of individuals with the sole aim of influencing the outcome of an election to favour a candidate (Ezeani, 2004). However, the conduct of election in Nigeria which is hindered by various forms of electoral frauds which negates the basic principles of good governance such as effective participation of the citizens in the decision making process, the observance of rule of law, which even the government of the day violates, equity, accountability, responsiveness, effectiveness and efficiency. Good governance according to Gbemudu and Ajobor (2019) is based on the conviction of the society where leadership and followership adhere to due process, rule of law, and act responsibly and responsive to set objectives whether in societal governance or corporate governance. To Davis (2003) and Madhav (2007) good governance is the management of socio-economic development in an environment devoid of rancor, ill will, strife, struggle and disdain. The implication of the above is that if elections are free and transparent, it would help to produce leaders who are accountable to the people, ensure the participation of the citizens in their own affairs, observance of the rule of law which will promote equal justice for all and as well ensure that the voice of the minority groups are heard in the decision making process. This is why Oyovbaire (2007) posited that good governance entails the use of power and authority to affect human conditions so as to improve the quality of human life and as well transform the physical environment. However, despite the fact that Nigeria operates a democratic system of government which would ensure government of law and not of man that will enthrone good governance, it is sad to state that incidences of dictatorship, autocratic tendencies, mismanagement of resources and abuse of political offices, corruption, lack of press freedom, intimidation etc are still evident in our national life which are by product of electoral frauds.

## 2. MANIFESTATION OF ELECTORAL FRAUDS IN ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

Electoral fraud, sometimes referred to by many as electoral malpractice, election manipulation or vote rigging simply means illegal interference with the process of an election either by increasing the vote share of the favoured candidate, while depressing the vote share of the opposition candidates.

Electoral frauds are the failing of all electoral institutions to conduct election in a manner that will provide equal opportunity for all citizens to participate actively in choosing their leaders. It is therefore any act that hinders the conduct of free and fair elections. It is an act of lawlessness that could mean the conduct of election for people to cast their votes. This has however served the ignoble purposes of making the people to lose confidence and support for Nigeria's nascent democracy. Nonetheless, in Nigeria, electoral frauds take the following forms;

I. **Vote Buying:** Vote buying the most recent electoral fraud in Nigeria simply means the exchange of private material benefits for political support. It is an action in which the voter sells his or her vote to the highest bidder. It is also a form of financial, material or promising inducement or reward by a candidate, political party, agent or supporter to influence a voter to cast his or her vote or even abstain from doing so in order to enhance the chances of a particular candidate to win in an election. This is seen as an integral practice, just like a typical market environment, the politicians, political parties and party agents become the buyers of votes or vote buyers while the prospective voters are the potential vote sellers. In this therefore, voters cast their votes not according to their consciences but based on the highest bidder. In this situation what determines the value or price of a vote by the vote seller is the level of desperation of our politicians since everybody wants to win an election no matter the means, because for them the end justifies the means. In the just concluded 2019 general elections in Nigeria, vote buying and vote selling became prominent and Nigerian politicians adopted two approaches in perpetrating their act. The first is the cash for vote method and the vote for cash method. In all the stages of election conducted in Nigeria in 2019 which ranges from Presidential, National Assembly elections, Governorship and House of Assembly elections, vote buying which became very prominent ranges from N2,000, N3,000, N4,000 and N5,000 depending on the political parties and the candidates. The two major political parties in the said election, the APC that is the ruling party and desperate to

return to maintain their position and the People's Democratic Party, the PDP that is in the opposition and wants to return to power again are the major culprits. It would be stated here that there were glaring cases of vote buying during the 2019 election was too disappointing to the sustainability of our democracy.

**II. Intimidation:** Intimidation simply means the act of making someone to feel afraid or timid. This is intimidating a weaker person to do something which ordinarily he or she would not have done. According to Ani, Omeh and Ike (2013), voter intimidation involves the act of putting undue pressure on a voter or group of voters so as to vote in a particular way. In the event of this scenario some voters may out of their own volition decide not to participate in the voting process as he/she does not have protection. In the electoral process in Nigeria, this act takes the following forms, such as violence or threat of violence. This occurs in Nigeria when voters in a particular location, especially in the strongholds of a particular candidate are usually being threatened by an opposing, supporter of another candidate. This happened in Osun state Governorship election, Ekiti, Kano, Rivers, Akwa-Ibom, Anambra state and so many other states of the federation. This also takes the form of carrying out attacks in polling units especially when a candidate in the election noticed that the result may not be to his/her favour. In the 2019 Governorship election in Rivers state, security agencies were used by the ruling political party in Nigeria, the APC to intimidate the people and even to the extent of the Nigerian military getting involved in the collation of election results. In all the states in Nigeria, the story was not different. According to Nnamani (2014) he posited that Nigeria election is such that mobs wield lethal and non lethal weapons such as guns, cutlasses, sticks, stones, bottles to scare opponents and to as well rig elections to their favour. This occurred in Kano state in the re-run election conducted as the election was declared inconclusive. He further pointed out the case of the Resident Electoral Commissioner in Ekiti state Governorship election, who as a result of threat to her life has no option than to resign her appointment. Also, the incumbent governor of Kaduna state Mallam Nasir El-rufai who threatened the international observers in the build up to the 2019 general election in Nigeria.

**III. Ballot Box Snatching:** One of the ways of perpetrating electoral fraud in Nigeria is the snatching of the ballot boxes by desperate politicians who wants to win an election by all means. This they do by invading polling units by armed thugs who normally scare people

away and vamoose with the ballot boxes. This occurs when some desperate politicians presume that the outcome of the election may not favour them. Sometimes these ballot boxes are just destroyed so that the result would not count for the strong candidates. According to Okafor (2003) the root of all these electoral frauds committed by politicians in their bid to win at all cost was the struggle to win and control state power and use same for selfish aims. Oddih (2007) lamented that Nigeria's political instability caused by electoral frauds of different magnitude can be traced to socio-economic factors more especially poverty. He argued that about 65% of Nigerian live below \$2 per day and corruption seem to worsen issues for the country. In view of all these problems, he posited that since the poverty level is high, coupled with an absence of clear moral values, vote buying which is now the order of the day is very common and this posses great challenge to good governance in Nigeria as public officials are no longer accountable and responsible to the people which is one of the hallmark of democratic governance.

**IV. Under Age Voting and Multiple Voting:** This is another form of electoral fraud common in various levels of elections in Nigeria ranging from Presidential, National Assembly, Governorship and House of Assembly elections. Lamenting on the spate of underage voting and multiple voting, Oddih (2007) argued that this problem is compounded also by impersonation and prevention of genuine voters from voting to choose their leaders. This form of electoral fraud also characterized the 2019 general election in Nigeria. Many of the voters registered in different polling units and on the day of voting, they move around and vote in all these centres and were paidup to N3,000 to N4,000 at each voting point they visited. To those voters, what matters to them was how much they made at each election as they believed that, this is their own democracy dividend. According to the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 as amended and the Electoral Act, Suffrage age is 18 years and above. The implication of this is that for one to qualify to vote, such voter must be 18 years and above, and anyone who is below the age of 18 is not qualified to vote. Despite this provision, in the just concluded general election in Nigeria, children below voting age in the Northern part of the country were seen voting at different polling units. These set of people aids multiple voting as they were seen thumb printing different ballot papers at same time.

**V. Falsification of Results/Ballot Box Stuffing:** This also characterized the conduct of elections in Nigeria since independence in 1960. This occurs when ballot papers are added to ballot boxes at the polling units whose results were in the process of being counted so as to favour one candidate. Also, result sheets are being tampered with in collaboration with INEC officials to always favour the ruling political party either at the federal or state level. In the just concluded general election in Nigeria for instance the case of Rivers state where the military were involved in collating election results with the intention of tampering with the figures but this later led to the suspension of the collation of the results by INEC. Sometimes, INEC Adhoc staff are being used to perpetuate this fraud. This act therefore leads to the case of over voting where the total number of votes cast is higher than the registered voters all in a bid to favour a particular candidate in an election. To eliminate this type of situation, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Nigeria, introduced the use of card readers for purposes of accreditation to ensure that only those who were accredited are allowed to vote. All these therefore undermine the basic attributes of good governance such as transparency in the conduct of election and strict observance of the rule of law.

**Bribery and Corruption:** Bribery and corruption among the officials saddled with the responsibility of conducting a free and transparent election. This is one of the socio-economic problems that has hindered the country for so many years now and this has eroded the country all forms of good governance. This has affected the democratic governance especially the electoral process as this brings about vote buying and manipulation of the entire electoral process. Corruption has many negative impacts on politics and governance in Nigeria. Corruption leads to violence, ballot snatching, intimidation, falsification of results, rigging, underage voting etc. this causes massive looting of the treasury so as to amass enough wealth that helps desperate politicians to manipulate their way through. During elections in Nigeria, the political party in power normally share money to party faithfuls that will be used to buy more votes. This is why a voter sells his/her vote to the tune of N3,000, N4,000, N5,000. In the electoral process in Nigeria, this takes place when party agents get the voters to show them whom they voted for as a pre-condition for payment. Also, electoral fraud takes the form of impersonation, diversion of electoral materials from collation centres to unknown

destinations where ballot papers will be massively thumb printed and hence stuffed into ballot boxes to favour a particular candidate. This is done mostly with the connivance of the security agencies deployed to help ensure that the conduct of elections are free and transparent. The voters are sometimes scared away by armed thugs to ensure that electoral materials are diverted.

**Misinformation:** Misinformation is another form of electoral fraud common in Nigeria today. This is a situation where misleading information is disseminated in an attempt to influence the outcome of election result. According to Ani, Omeh and Chinedu (2013), it involves the use of smear campaigns, circulation of false rumours against a particular candidate or party. Also, the voters may be given wrong information about the time and venue of an election thereby making it possible for them not to vote in the election. In the build up to 2019 general election, each of the major political parties in Nigeria were brandishing false information over each other. The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the ruling All Progressive Congress (APC) in an attempt to dissuade the prospective voters from voting the parties of their choice.

**Invalidation of Ballots:** Invalidation of ballots in an election is another form of electoral fraud common with the electoral process in Nigeria. A form of invalidation of ballot in Nigeria is what the Independent National Electoral Commission refers to as inconclusive election or a situation where the election management body declares a particular election as inconclusive. This was done according to experts to favour a particular candidate or party. In the Osun Governorship election, the exercise was declared inconclusive when it was discovered that the opposition Peoples Democratic party was leading the All Progressive Congress. When a runoff election was finally conducted, the ruling party at the centre used all forms of intimidation, and harassment of the opposition to ensure that the ruling party in the state was returned. Also in the 2019 Governorship election in Kano, the same method was adopted thereby scaring the opposition away hence paving way for the ruling party to have a field day.



### **3. THE IMPACT OF ELECTORAL FRAUDS ON GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA**

The concept of good governance according to Gbemudu and Ajobor (2019) is a situation in human society where leadership and followership adhere to due process, rule of law and act responsibly and responsive to set objectives in societal or corporate governance. On the other hand, he also posits that governance in itself means the act of governing. It is also seen as how public institutions conduct public affairs. This means how those who occupy positions of authority at various levels conduct their affairs. The concept of good governance in this circumstance simply implies how to enhance efficiency and effectiveness in the allocation of public resources to ensure that there is equity and fairness in distribution. The following are some of the attributes of good governance which every responsible and responsive public institutions always strive to uphold in the conduct of its affairs.

**The Constitution and Rule of Law:** The notion of good governance in any given society requires the existence of fair legal framework, a situation where all are equal before the law and the constitution is enforced by an immortal body. According to Dicey (1959) the constitution of any given society is the supreme authority in the state. Based on the above, therefore, it means that governmental agencies and individuals alike must abide by lay down rules and regulations for the good of all. In this therefore, the 1999 constitution of Nigeria as amended provides the roles of the government and responsibilities of the citizens. Despite the provisions of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria and the Nigeria's Electoral Act which provides the responsibilities of both the government and its agencies, and the general public in the conduct of elections which shall enthrone good governance, these constitutional provisions are usually being violated in an attempt to manipulate the process for a particular candidate to win in an election. This will therefore give room for all forms of electoral fraud to occur and as such elections are conducted in total violation of the rules of the game and this therefore hinders good governance in Nigeria.

**Public Participation in the Conduct of Affairs:** This is in line with the democratic principles of allowing the people opportunity to choose whoever that will govern them. Democracy as we all know safeguards the fundamental rights of man, for example, the right to vote and be voted for. According to Yu Keping (2015), the participation of the people in taking decisions that affects

them helps to prevent abuse by those who occupy public offices. However, the conduct of elections in Nigeria which provides opportunity for the electorates to be denied the choice of those that will pilot the affairs of the society through the perpetration of various degrees of electoral frauds makes it difficult for leaders that will help to enthrone good governance in Nigeria to be elected. This therefore negates the democratic principles of popular participation of the people in choosing their leaders as democracy is seen as the government of the people, by the people and for the people. Lack of public participation in the conduct of their affairs hinders good governance.

Electorates in Nigeria are sometime being disenfranchised in an attempt to ensure that a particular candidate from a given political party wins an election. This occurs when a legitimate voter may be accidentally removed from the voter register hence making it difficult for them to cast their votes since their names could not be found in the electoral register. Ani, Omeh and Chinedu (2013). For instance in the second term governorship election of Mr. Peter Obi in Anambra state, the name of the PDP candidate and every other members of his family in that election disappeared from the voters list hence making it difficult for them to cast their votes and in several polling units in Anambra in the said election voters could not find their names in the register. This form of electoral fraud impacts negatively on popular participations of the people in conducting their affairs. This however negates the principle of good governance in Nigeria.

**Transparency and Accountability of the Public Institution:** This therefore implies that the conduct of public official in the process of allocation of scarce resources of the public must be done in a transparent manner. In the same vein also, public officials must be accountable to the people as this is one of the hallmark of democratic governance. The accountability of the governing elites is tested in a free and transparent election which give equal opportunity for all to make their choice. According to Gbemudu and Ajobor (2019) in Jega (2007) government is accountable to those who will be affected by its decisions or actions as well as the applicable rules and law when establishing a nexus between the principle of the rule of law and good governance. Transparency in the conduct of public officials brings about accountability on how scarce resources are being utilized. This is what good governance entails and the general public must adhere strictly to lay down rules and regulations.

The implication of the above is strict observance to the rule of law. In Nigeria today, there is total violation of the provisions of the constitution. The fundamental human rights of the individual are not safeguarded, suppression of the press freedom, the right of the opposition are not guaranteed, lives and property of the individual are not guaranteed, etc. All these negate the basic principles of good governance in Nigeria.

Equity and inclusiveness in the conduct of the affairs of the state by public officials entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring equitable allocation of resources of the society. The above provisions depends on how to ensure that all members of the society have a stake in their own affairs and does not in any way feel excluded from the mainstream of the society. This is a situation where all individuals whether rich or poor have equal access to the common resources. Under this therefore, the right of the minority groups in the society are protected. In Nigeria, the rights of the poor and vulnerable groups are being trampled upon by public authorities and there is widespread marginalisation of the common man in the street. There is a sharp divide between the rich and the poor. The rich are getting richer while the poor are getting poorer. This therefore poses great challenge to good governance in Nigeria.

In conclusion, in view of all these challenges to good governance in Nigeria, there is still room for improvement. For good governance to be effective, all the attributes of a democratic government must prevail so as to restore confidence in the people. Democracy as a system of government guarantees the fundamental human rights of the individual, guarantees press freedom, upholds the rule of law, ensure transparency and accountability in the conduct of government business so as to ensure equity. In the process of choosing public office holders, the right of the electorate must be guaranteed and all forms of electoral fraud prohibited. There should be complete separation of powers in such a way that each arm of government functions effectively without intimidation. This is the only way the right of the individual will be safe guarded.

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