

# Voters' Education: A Tool for Credible Election in Nigeria

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The transition from military dictatorship to democracy, Nigeria-state has experienced various electoral misconducts since with twenty one (21) years of continuous democratic governance in the fourth republic which began in 1999, but not yet developed any acceptable democratic culture. This can be seen in the high level of voter's unwillingness to vote during the 2007, 2011 and especially 2019 general elections which many agreed were "deeply flawed" and accompanied by vote rigging, theft of ballot boxes and violence. It is voter's willingness that paved ways for politicians to manipulate the process of voter's registration during 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019 general elections in Nigeria. It is evident that voters do not know their rights, not properly guided in terms of voting and such voters are not protected. However, the 2019 general election was characterized by vote rigging, buying, violence, theft of ballot boxes, logistics etc. Therefore, this paper discussed the importance of voters' education in credible elections and its challenges. The study concluded by stating the need for viable or credible electoral system, establishment of Electoral Crime Commission charge with the responsibility of punishing electoral offenders for vote buying.

*Keywords: Credible election, Voter's education, Electoral crime, Electoral malpractices.*

## Introduction

The electoral process is one of the bulwarks of democracy with voters as major stakeholders in the process. This is because, if the people lose confidence in the process, democracy as a system of populace participation in government will become a sham. The aim of an electoral process should be free and fair election where the candidate with the highest votes wins. However, the voters that vote during any election must know their rights and roles in making the electoral process credible. It is when the voter rights are protected during the electoral process that credible elections can be conducted, and credible and popular candidates, emerge as winners. (James and Ekanem, 2011).

Different groups and individuals have divergent views about elections in which such include credible elections. The opinion of the people on the electoral process of a nation as well as the quality and regularity of political consciousness tends to have great impact on their voting behaviour. Anyaele (2003) absented free and fair elections "as one conducted in an atmosphere devoid of harassment, intimidation and other coercive means in order to bend the will of the voters and according to constitutional procedures."

In Nigeria, the thinking of the populace is translated to the conduct of credible elections which makes it very important to constitute a strong and Vibrant electoral process through which this can be achieved via peaceful and acceptable means. For instance, the Nigerian government have at various times constituted an organ which is responsible for the conduct and supervision of elections based on an adopted electoral system, that is the Independent National Electoral Commission was instituted to oversee the affairs of the general election.

In April 2011, during the general elections conducted, there were concerted efforts by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Civil Society Groups (CSGs), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Community Based Organizations (CBOs), to educate voters on their rights and civil responsibilities. But it was discovered that many voters were ignorant of the provisions of the Electoral Act with respect to voting procedures. This ignorance resulted to cancellation and voided in many states like Kaduna, Rivers, Ogun, Jigawa etc.

This means the duty of educating the potential voters in Nigeria is a sole responsibility of INEC and other agencies such as National Orientation Agency (NOA), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Civil

Society Groups (CSGs) and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), to assist the electoral bodies in awareness campaign and educating voters.

Voter's education is an element of the electoral process whose role cannot be underestimated. Voters' Education is designed to ensure that voters are ready, willing, and able to participate in electoral politics (Akintayo, 2010). It involves the selection of representatives through the electoral process. Therefore, it is important to state the voters have confidence in the electoral process when they are properly guided and educated about the procedures. Voters' education aims to prepare potential voters for participation in an election, this is because if voters were not ready or educated to participate in the electoral process, it may affect representation. Therefore, through voters' Education, Nigerians will be sensitized about the elections as well as reposing their confidence in the general electoral system.

The major setbacks of voters' Education procedures are timing and dissemination of information through media. To lay credence to this, the Electoral Reform Network (2005) alleged that "the civic and Voters' Education for elections are usually conducted too close to the elections and as such, does not permit the realization of the full benefits of Voters' Education therefore, rendering the Voters' Education process ineffective."

It is quite unfortunate that in Nigeria, we are yet to establish the necessary conditions for effective and efficient Voters' Education to prepare or motivated Voters on election procedures of the nation with the aim of achieving credible elections for sustainable democracy.

### **Concepts Clarification**

#### **Voters' Education**

Citizen-Voters' Education Campaign (2005-2009) opined that "Voters' Education is the education, which depends on the understanding of the electorates about democracy and their participative role in its practice and would ensure the broadest and effective participation in governance." The following electoral areas will be addressed:

1. The perceived voter preference based on popularity and glamour rather than on the basis of platform and program.
2. Rampant vote-buying.
3. Confusion, anomalies, and threats in the voting process.
4. Problem of popularizing the new modernizing system of election.
5. Continuing problem of familiarization with the party-list system.
6. Participation of marginalized and underrepresented sectors in the electoral process.
7. Problem of citizens monitoring of electoral process.
8. Problem of citizen participation in governance and continuing engagement with the elected government; and
9. Clarifying the role citizens in a working democracy. (Campaign, 2005)

Waheed (2011) views "Voters' education as an enterprise to ensure that now voters are ready to participate in electoral process and to know who the best choice is beyond political, ethnic or other affiliations." He further explained that elections are always defining moments in the history of nations, so major stakeholders of elections, i. e., voters should have sufficient education as to how, when and to whom the choice is made.

LASIEC (2011) described "Voters' Education as those practicable strategies to raise the consciousness of the electorates on their socio-political tasks of internalizing universal electoral practices and acceptable voting procedure in the country." It added that this Voters' Education should have the following objectives:

1. Sensitizing electorates generally on voting procedure, electoral processes and other civic obligations and duties.
2. Educate the electorates against election malpractices such as hooliganism, electoral violence, ballot boxes snuffing and snatching, multiple thump-printing and falsification of result.
3. Educate members of political parties and other major stakeholders on relevant electoral guidelines, rules and regulations,

constitutional provisions and acts guiding electoral practices.

4. To enlighten the voters on the benefits and effects of democratic governance and its features such as periodic elections, universal adult suffrage, free and fair elections, independent electoral bodies, inalienable human rights, independent judiciary, free and vibrant press, etc.

In essence, Voters' Education in summary is the process of informing the public on their democratic rights, election procedures, candidacy and the issues associated with the electoral process as well as credible elections. For instance, an individual can have impact on elections (especially local elections) by simply letting friends, neighbours, co-workers, and others, know where candidates stand on issues that matter to them. For example, if one's passion is education, and candidate A has cut funding to schools, while Candidate B increased it, tell other people around is a part off Voters' Education.

#### **Voting Rights (Franchise or Suffrage)**

Voting is a vital mechanism of election and is the fundamental civic right and this right is granted through the principle of Universal Adult Suffrage. It also falls under "Human Rights" which provides the "Human to Democracy", which is contained in "Article 21" of the United Nations' Charter on human rights. Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representations. Everyone has the right to equal access to public service in his country. The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures. In Nigeria the constitutional right to vote for every Nigerian citizen who has attained the age of eighteen (18) years are contained in sections and Subsections of 77 (2); 117 (2), 132 (5) and 178 (5). This right exists as embodied in the universal declaration of human right and the entire body of international human rights law. (James and Ekanem, 2011).

According to Oyeneye, Onyenwenu and Olosunde (2002), Suffrage or franchise "is the right of adult citizens of a nation to vote in an election." In every country, there is always an electoral law, which stipulates the qualification of electors and those to be elected. The process of enfranchisement is therefore the way each citizen fulfils the conditions of laws that make him/her eligible as a voter.

Voting rights are usually fought for, because they are not always extended to all citizens of a country. In Nigeria, the right to vote was developed from the colonial period during which elections in Lagos and Calabar were based on property, educational qualifications, and the social status of citizens (Oyeneye, Onyenwenu and Olosunde, 2002). These criteria determined those who could vote and be voted for. Increasingly, the base for franchise was broadened to accommodate all qualified adult citizens. i. e., universal franchise.

#### **Political Participation**

This is voluntary participation of electorates in politics of the country or state. As asserted by Conway (2000), "political participation is a political commitment. He added that it could equally be thought of as the citizens' rights and obligations manifest in formal political settings." Similarly, Gil de Zúñiga, Jung and Valenzuela (2012) had noted that the concept, 'Political Participation alludes to activities undertaken by the electorate in active participation in processes leading to selection of governmental representatives or leaders. Again, Gil de Zúñiga et al., (2012) described political participation as a movement that affects government activity; either directly or indirectly in constituting those involved in governance.

#### **Voting**

Voting is a common practice in contemporary democratic political activities (Berger, 2017). Zahida and Younis (2014) considered "Voting as the function of electing representatives by casting votes in an election, and that citizens use this method to either express their approval or disapproval of government decisions, policies and programmes, by various political parties as well

as selecting the right candidates that would maximally project the interest of the people (the electorates)” Brams and Fishburn (2002) conceptualised voting as a broad and encompassing procedure. Thus, voting encompasses various interrelated functions like selection of governors, influencing government policies, office holders and candidates, individual’s allegiance to the existing constitutional regime; voter’s disaffection from existing constitutional regime; emotional significance and expression of political group interest. The assertion on voting therefore gives rise to the voting behaviour of the electorates.

### **Voters’ Education and Credible Elections**

Experience has shown that the true test of democracy is the ability to conduct free and fair election, and this partly premised on the competence of Election Managers charged with this responsibility. In addition, the roles of electorates in any given environment cannot be over-emphasized in view of their domineering number in the electoral process.

It has been widely posited that the quest for credible election in the country today could best be achieved through the attitudinal change of the electorates. Aside the capacity of the Electoral body to deliver, voters need to have positive perception and right orientation about the inalienable roles expected of them if democracy in Nigeria is to stabilize. This task can only be best achieved through thorough and apt Voters’ Education (LASIEC, 2011).

Voters’ Education promotes meaningful participation of citizens in the electoral and political processes, and in enhancing the credibility of the whole process {citizen-Voters’ Education Campaign (2005-2009). Voters’ Education calls for the political culture and the political awareness of the political parties, candidates, and most importantly the electorates. The education of voters with an overhaul of electoral and political structures, processes, policies, and mechanisms tends to evolve around the primacy of party platforms and programs rather than personalities and enhances people’s democratic participation in both the electoral process and in governance. In essence, it will lead to the development of a politically mature and critical electorate

conversant with the processes and requirements of a full-fledged democracy.

Uwais in Ayanruoh (2011) added that representative government can be effective in Nigeria if its citizenry can hold it accountable for its actions and by their obligation to participate in the fundamental processes of democracy, such as developing an understanding of how democratic government functions, going to the polls to vote and by being attentive to the public issues that have an impact on our national life though ample Voters’ Education.

Voters’ Education helps in enlightening the electorates through acquitting them with an electoral system that will offer voters a choice of candidates and parties rather than just a choice of party lists in elections (Uwais in Ayanruoh, 2011).

### **Challenges of 2019 General Election**

The 2019 general elections were conducted twenty years after returning to democratic rule in Nigeria which was marred by vote buying, rigging, violence, problems of logistics. During the election, Nigerians voted to elect their president, but the citizens were disappointed because the election was plague with various electoral misconducts such as thuggery, shooting, ballot box snatching, killings etc. To support this, the European Union Election Observation Mission final report revealed that “the elections were marked by severe operational and transparency shortcomings, electoral security problems and low turnout of voters, considering increase in the number of PVC collected prior to the general elections” (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2019).

Also, the European Union Election Observation Mission to Nigeria Published final report on the 2019 general elections where, Maria Arena and the EU Chief Observer noted systemic failings seen in the elections, and relatively low levels of voter participation, indicating the need for fundamental electoral reforms (Maclean et al., 2019). It was noted there was delaying in the deployment of sensitive materials, that led to delay in commencement of elections in some polling units on Election Day across Nigeria.

YIAGA observed that as at 12 pm on Election Day, election had not commenced in most polling units, whereas electoral officials were expected to be at polling units by 7:30 am. Again, reports were received that as at 10:00 am, only 41% of the polling units had resumed. From the available reports, security operatives were fully deployed in at least 90% i.e., 120,000 polling units nationwide. Despite this security architecture, there were reports of activities of political thugs on motorbikes in Lagos (Moshood, 2019).

The card readers were not functioning as expected during accreditation exercise, resulted to failure of recognizing voters' fingerprints, their PVCs rejection of fingerprint slow down the process because of poor connectivity of internet and little knowledge on the use of card readers by both INEC officials and electorates.

Permanent voter's cards were bought from voters which makes vote selling and buying easy for politicians. This resulted to a situation where voters lose their voting power in exchange for materials and money. Vote buying was means of survival as one vote during election cost between N1000 to N10,000. Most candidates believe that you cannot win election without money and the politicians will regain money they spent through corruption and multiplication of cost projects.

Also, poverty is another problem of 2019 general election that did not make the voters to think of their rights because they wanted to meet their needs, thereby sold to politician/party candidates permanent voter cards. Some voters sold their cards within the ranges of N1000 to N10,000 not because they are poor but because of greed.

Politicians recruited youths, unemployed as political thugs killing political opponents, snatching ballot boxes, violence, kidnapping INEC officials, disorganizing collation centres and the reward for their actions is huge sum of money and material gifts.

The general election was marred with allegations of inconclusiveness, illegal thumb printing on ballot papers in collaboration of INEC officials and security agencies. Evidence from 2019 general elections is the case of Bauchi State governorship election to which a

court issued a restraining order against the Independent National Electoral Commission on Tuesday, March 19, 2019, restricting it from concluding its planned collation and announcement of results until the hearing of an application filed by the All Progressive Congress (APC) and its candidate, in protest of the exercise that was alleged to be rigged (Toromade, 2019).

### **Conclusion**

The importance and the need for political education is of paramount in Nigeria democracy. Nigerian voters should be educated to vote for a credible leader freely and independently. They should be educated on electoral offence such as underage voters etc. They should know why they vote. Since electoral process is vital to democracy with voters as major stakeholders in the process. Therefore, voters should be given right education and protected for the enhancement of credible election (s).

### **Recommendations**

The following are recommendations proffered:

- i. There is need for National Institutes established by Government to work hand in hand with institute of policy and strategies and institute of democratic studies to produce Nigerian citizen with positive and progressive thinking.
- ii. There is need for activities of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Community Based Organizations (CBOs), and Civil Society Groups (CSGs) to be strengthened and work with democratic institution (s) like Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to build up the conscience of Nigerians about the new liberal democracy and its benefits.
- iii. National Orientation Agency (NOA) and other agencies should organize conferences, workshops, and seminars to inform people on credible future elections in Nigeria.
- iv. There must be diffusion of power by INEC to avoid operational failure.
- v. There is need for INEC to increase its budget on voters' education.

- vi. Government should set up Electoral crime commission to prosecute electoral offenders.
- vii. There should be regular preparation and motivation for the attainment of credible election.
- viii. And finally, subjects (Social Studies, Political Science, etc.) which contents have link with aspect of leadership, democracy, election, voting, etc. should be taught effectively in all levels of education. This tends to make an individual acquire knowledge on procedures of election during their study.

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