

People’s Perception on Electoral Process in Nigeria: a Case Study of Oorelope Local Government Area of Oyo State

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Abstract: Democracy thrives on enabling ethos, practices and institutions that are fully or virtually matured so as to guarantee continuity through fair play, debate, compromise and opposition. It is in recognition of this that the paper examines the significance of people’s perception on electoral process. It argues that credibility of elections in a democratic society engenders active involvement of citizens in politics. A sample of 180 people was chosen at random from three main zones in Igboho. Relying on empirical method of analysis, self-designed questionnaire was administered to collect data just as paired T-test was employed to analyse and interpret data. The findings indicate that the electorates express apathy owing to the usual practice where the electoral body compromised its integrity and honour and further unleashed credibility crisis on the government. This situation makes voters disillusioned because the outcome of elections, in most cases, is not a true reflection of their wishes. Based on this, the paper recommends an impartial electoral umpire, inculcation of democratic ethos in the society, and ensuring that the people are allowed to decide for themselves the type of government and political leadership deemed appropriate.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Democracy involves a commitment to give both men and women equal opportunity to develop their individual capacities exemplified in individual participation in the decisions that involve one’s life. The purpose of political participation is wrapped up in the concept of representation, the linking of the interests of the citizens with the policies of the state. However, Nigeria’s democracy runs in a collision with known cherished democratic norms as it is beset with a huge burden of ‘demo-deficits’(Omelle, 2005) calculated in terms of senseless loss of lives and property, deepening mass poverty pervasiveness, unemployment spirals, hydra-headed crime waves, infrastructure decadence, loss of public confidence in the capacity of the state to cope with the growing multi- dimensional ills in the country’s democratic governance, flagrant abuse of due process in governance.

The experience of civilian rule in Nigeria since 1999 has shown that access to power is viewed as the means to influence, affluence and authority because fractions of the political elite often scheme to appropriate political rewards. In what could be likened to “market democracy” (Hippler, 1995), and “plutocracy” (Omelle, 2005), Nigeria’s democracy indicates a scenario in which only the interest of a few politicians and neo-liberal institutions stand at advantage, while the majority of the people are disempowered. What is more, law abiding citizen is literally ‘consumed’ by the combination of firepower and the influence of illicit money to determine election victories (Akinkuotu, 2015). In this context, the conflictual nature of politics and elections is also linked to the critical role of the state as the distributor of rewards (Seteolu, 2005; Joseph, 1987). This situation makes “Nigerians less content with the current political circumstances and less enthusiastic about the system of democracy” (Olutayo & Abisoye, 2009). Whereas procedural legitimacy implies that government agencies must be justified, and ensure that regulatory decision making follows formal rules, which often requires public participation, (Ogundiya, 2000), the officials or leaders of government did not possess the quality of “rightness”, propriety or moral goodness that should be accepted. With the manner INEC is manipulated, it is significant to examine how systemic and attitudinal problems affecting Nigeria’s democracy have impact on the electorate. The failure of the Nigerian State and its political elites to change their attitude of business-as-usual and cultivate a new mindset that conforms to democratic demands has made attainment of credible election a mirage. It is apt to note that elections are charade and a clear negation of democratic ideals and tenets. As a corollary, the masses appear to have lost hope in the electoral system as rigging of elections and associate fraudulent practices have become endemic and unprecedented.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

With the exception of the 1993 presidential election, experience has shown that open, competitive and meaningful electoral politics have been elusive in Nigeria. The problematic nature of electoral process is linked to the nature of the Nigerian state, character of the political elite, limited autonomy of electoral bodies, unreliable voters' register, the politicization of court system, state control of security agents, pervasive economic crisis, pauperization of the populace, manipulation of the media and emasculation of the opposition parties, suppression, repression, prebendal politics as well as "centrifugal forces including ethnicity, regionalism, class, and leadership personalities" (Kamalu & Fonge, 2012). The tendency for the political leadership to flout and subvert the rule of law with impunity laid the foundation for the flagrant electoral irregularities and monumental fraud perpetrated during elections. Indeed, Nigerian elections are often characterized by violence, intimidation and use of coercive instruments of the state to commit acts of rigging, suppression and disenfranchisement of eligible voters. Based on this, the paper attempts to carry out an empirical investigation on people's perception on electoral process in Nigeria with particular focus on the electorate of Oorelope Local Government Area of Oyo state.

Conceptual Clarifications

Political participation refers to activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government action either directly by affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make these policies (Olutato & Abisoye, 2009). As a *sine qua non* to democracy, political participation involves those voluntary activities such as holding public and party office, being a candidate for office, attending election campaigns, voting and exposing oneself to political stimuli.

Electoral security involves the process of protecting electoral stakeholders such as voters, candidates, polling workers, media, and observers, electoral information such as vote results, registration data, and campaign material; electoral facilities such as polling stations and counting centres; and electoral events such as campaign rallies against death, damage, or destruction (Albert, 2007)

Electoral Process and Voting Behaviour

The success of constitutional democracy is tied to the integrity of electoral process. By the same token, the quality of representative government is also linked to the capacity of a state to evolve a viable, transparent, electoral system that inspires the confidence of broad spectrum of civil society and contending fractions of political elite. The historical trajectories of electoral politics in Nigeria, however, show the pervasive struggle to control electoral machinery for individual votes. Thus, the political parties tie the prospects of electoral success to their capacity to manipulate the electoral system or prevent the hijack of structures that favour a specific party (Seteolu, 2005). It needs be emphasized that democratic system of government provides the process of civilianization of rule. It involves a process of electing leaders who will form a government of the people with a view to representing the interest of the generality of members of the society. Therefore, democracy is aimed at realizing the organization of people, by the people themselves, to attain the collectively self-designed, and ever improving, higher levels of civilization (Mohammed, 2009). This conception of democracy suggests that it is a representational government which is based on the consent and will of the people, a responsive and responsible government in which the majority upholds power without suppressing the interest of the minority.

At this point, the most vital theoretical issue relating to elections is not what motivates voters to turn out, or even to vote as they do, but the meaning of their voting behaviour for their political and social systems as a whole. It is not just about the frequency and direction of political participation, but its quality is all that matters most. Therefore, it is pertinent to note that the hallmark of modern democracy is the process of selecting leaders who are expected to be responsive and responsible to those who elected them, i.e. the electorate. In addition to providing good leadership and governance, transparent conduct of public office and a selfless leadership devoid of corrupt practices or political vindictiveness against the opposition, election is central to any democratic process. It provides a peaceful transfer of power from one government to another and thus a peaceful coexistence among the different people and social groups that make up a society. To this extent, a free and fair election is an important yardstick for determining the viability of any democratic process. It is in this vein that in Nigeria's journey to democratic consolidation and sustenance the conduct of free, fair, credible and transparent elections is badly needed. Instead of gaining political legitimacy by acceptable and popular transfer of power, elections in Nigeria serve as bedrock to political corruption. According to Elliot (1997), when it is pervasive and uncontrolled, corruption thwarts economic development and undermines political legitimacy. Less pervasive variants results in wasted resources, increased inequity in resource distribution, less political competition and greater distrust of government.

Little wonder, it is difficult to find politicians who imbibe and develop the mindset of adopting political tolerance, participation and the rules of competitive politics. The absence of enabling conditions for democratic participation at the grassroots is the greatest obstacle to democracy in Nigeria, "where every leader wants

absolute power, society is at war, war without end, because amidst the defeats and victories of particular battles, the underlying social dynamics remain the same" (Ake (1996) cf (Odofin (2005). As a result, various governments at different levels lack legitimacy as they clearly lose the democratic basis of their mandate, and this, in turn, make them overlook various aspects of democratic ethos. As such this pattern of political behaviour depends on justifying principle that public offices should be competed for and then utilized for the personal benefit of the office holders as well as their reference or support group (Joseph, 1987). Corroborating this view, Mohammed (2009) observes that the Nigerian polity is embroiled with systemic and constitutional lapses, attitudinal inappropriateness and the culture of primitive accumulation which informs the tendency of political leaders to remain in power at all cost until they want to quit politics or end their tenure. This aligns with the contention that Nigerian politics is characterized by a mixture of ex-military officers and business magnates in the country who are mainly "gatecrashers, moneybags, fraudsters and other opportunists who emerged and opportunistically ventured into politics" (Omelle, 2005) to promote civilian dictatorship.

Meanwhile, a cursory look at history reveals that the behaviour of political elite in the state in Africa is linked to traditional value system. The African society is patrilineal where political power is personalized, and the leadership is permanent in the context of self-recruited oligarchy. The socially imbibed values are replicated in political terrain where the contending coalitions accumulate resources to offset side payments required to retain and expand followership in the context of power politics. Thus, the explanation of voter alignment and behaviour should be located in the context of the culture of a society. As a consequence, politics in Nigeria is widely conceived as an investment to be pursued with deadly seriousness.

From this standpoint, Ogundiya (2000) posits that procedural legitimacy has been a scarce political commodity in the political life of Nigeria. This is because election results are juggled, inflated or annulled. As far as he is concerned, all the governments we have had in Nigeria are, to a very large extent, procedurally illegitimate. He stressed that legitimacy rests on the acknowledged source of authority underpinning the rules of appointment to the leading offices of the state; the capacity of its institutions to facilitate achievements of the ends or purpose of government; and regular expression of consent. When there is conviction shared by the rulers and the ruled that the existing political order is right; and where power is acquired and exercised according to justifiable rules and with evidence of consent, there exists legitimacy.

III. OBJECTIVES

- i To examine people's perception on electoral process in Oorelope Local Government of Oyo State.
- ii To assess the impact of electoral agency in the administration and conduct of election in Nigeria
- iii To ascertain if election outcomes reflect the wishes of the electorate
- iv To recommend better ways of improving electoral process in Nigeria

Research Hypotheses

- H₁: The electoral commission lacks full autonomy to conduct credible elections.
- H₂: State institutions do not promote the course of justice.
- H₃: Elections are not true reflections of the wishes of people.

IV. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Descriptive survey design was adopted for this study. This design is deemed appropriate as it involves direct contact with a target population. As an empirical study, the intention is to survey what is happening on the field and describe in a systematic manner the facts as collected from the field.

Population

The target population of the study consisted of residents (indigenes and non-indigenes) with suffrage rights at seven (7) wards in Igboho, headquarter of Oorelope Local Government Area. These are adults that have attained voting age of eighteen years and above.

Sample and Sampling Technique

One hundred and eighty (180) respondents formed the sample of the study. In line with the sectional nature of the town, 7 wards were randomly selected in the proportion of 3:2:2 from Obaago/Osheke, Igbope and Modeke with a view to investigating the level at which the electorate get involved in political activities based on their perception on electoral process in Oorelope Local Government Area of Oyo State.

Research instrument

A self-designed questionnaire known as "Peoples' Perception on the Electoral Process" was adopted. The instrument contained two parts. The first part of the instrument was designed to collect information on the

bio-data of the respondents while the second part is made up of items relating to the perceptions of the respondents on nature and dimension of electoral process.

Validity and Reliability of the instrument

The questionnaire was given to lecturers in the department of political science for scrutiny. Their various suggestions were taken into consideration in the final compilation of this study. This ensures the face validity of the instrument. Meanwhile, paired T-test was applied to establish the reliability test instrument.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: H₁: The electoral commission has no full autonomy to conduct credible elections

S/N	ITEMS	Agreed	%	Disagreed	%
1	INEC is a partial arbiter that exists at the mercy of government	97	53.9	83	46.1
2	State Resident Electoral Commissioners (RECs) connive with state governors to rig elections	109	60.5	71	39.5
3	Undue militarization of polling booths takes away civility of electoral process	121	67.3	59	32.7
4	There is a loss of public confidence in INEC and the security agents	93	51.7	87	48.3
5	In most cases, Returning Officers are instructed to announce preferred candidates of the incumbent government as winner	141	78.4	39	21.6

Source: Author's field work, 2014

Table 2: Paired samples statistics

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1 AGREE	112.2000	5	19.47306	8.70862
DISAGREE	67.8000	5	19.47306	8.70862

Table 3 Paired samples test

	Mean	N	Std. deviation	Std. error mean	T	df	Sig(2-tailed)
Pair1AGREE DISAGREE	44.40000	5	38.94612	17.41723	2.549	4	.063

Since t- calculated is greater than t-table, the hypothesis which says the electoral commission lacks full autonomy to conduct credible elections is accepted and therefore alternative hypothesis which means the electoral commission has full autonomy to conduct credible elections is rejected.

Table 4: H₂: State institutions hinder the course of justice

S/N	ITEMS	Agreed	%	Disagreed	%
1	Conflicting court rulings and partisan judgement dissuade people from voting	160	88.9	20	11.1
2	EFCC and ICPC are effective anti-graft agencies in Nigerian democracy	9	5	171	95
3	Inadequate security of Judges thwart effective judgement administration on election matters	172	95.6	8	4.4
4	Politicization of court system hampers prompt judgement delivery	153	85	27	15
5	Proceedings of Election Petition Tribunals amount to a travesty of justice	145	80.5	35	19.5

Source: Author's field work, 2014

Table 5: Paired samples statistics

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1 AGREE	127.8000	5	67.14685	30.02899
DISAGREE	52.2000	5	67.14685	30.02899

Table 6: Paired samples test

	Mean	N	Std. deviation	Std. error mean	T	Df	Sig(2-tailed)
Pair1 AGREE	75.60000	5	134.29371	60.05797	1.259	4	.277
DISAGREE							

Since t- calculated is greater than t-table, the hypothesis which says state institutions hinder the course of justice is accepted and therefore alternative hypothesis which means state institutions promote the course of justice is rejected.

Table 7 H₃: Elections negate democratic ideals and tenets

S/N	ITEMS	Agreed	%	Disagreed	%
1	Politicians adopt vote-buying strategy to influence voting pattern	174	96.7	6	3.3
2	Electoral officers are often coerced to manipulate election results	150	83.3	30	16.7
3	Cases of stuffed ballot boxes discourage people from voting	110	61.1	70	38.9
4	Political thugs snatch ballot boxes in the presence of security agents	101	56.2	79	43.8
5	Electoral security is not guaranteed during election	169	93.9	11	6.1

Source: Author's field work, 2014

Table 8: Paired samples statistics

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1 AGREE	140.8000	5	33.59613	15.02465
DISAGREE	39.2000	5	33.59613	15.02465

Table 9: Paired samples test

	Mean	N	Std. deviation	Std. error mean	T	df	Sig(2-tailed)
Pair1 AGREEDISAGREE	101.60000	5	67.19226	30.04929	3.381	4	.028

Since t- calculated is greater than t-table, the hypothesis which says elections negate democratic ideals and tenets is accepted and therefore alternative hypothesis which means elections uphold democratic ideals and tenets is rejected.

VI. CONCLUSION

When state institutions are not firmly rooted on the principles of democracy and the way the political leaders steers the democratic system contradict the development of a vibrant political culture, the expectations and wishes of people are usually subverted. Accordingly, citizens of any democratic society imbibe democracy by understanding it as an instrument of good governance, respect for the rule of law and provision of peoples' developmental needs. Thus, once citizens are convinced of the legality and authenticity of the electoral process, they tend to accept the outcome of the elections adjudged to be conducted in a free, fair, transparent and credible manner (Muhammed, 2009). Political legitimacy in a democratic society is a function of credible, transparent and violence-free election. Citizens in democratic societies legitimize their government because it governs according to the constitution. Political legitimacy is therefore associated with popular civic obedience from citizens, as belief in legitimacy of the authority commands the loyalty, respect and good will of the people and their compliance with the laws of their country.

Conversely, when a government is founded on some sort of electoral misconduct, it is no more representative of the electorate, and it will endanger the flourishing of the rule of law leading the government to actually lose its social empowerment credentials (see Okhueigbe, 2015). Beyond the formality and ritualization of elections, the Nigerian elections are 'illustrative of Claude Ake's observations that under the democratic transitions in Africa people were **voting without choosing** and of Thandika Mkandawire's characterization of African countries undergoing democratic transitions as 'choiceless democracies' (Jinadu,

2005). Based on the findings gathered from the field, members of the electorate want to be assured of the veracity of their choices as it is to the extent that every choice is respected that the overall result would reflect the true intents and wishes of the electorate (Olaitan, 2005; Adekunle, 2012; Aloysius, 2005). In this wise, the true will of the people would have to be reflected and respected for the people to have confidence in and stand by the democratic process. And given the extent that the sustenance of the democratic process is essentially dependent on the continuing support and confidence of the people, it is to the extent that the people have confidence in the electoral process that this could be secured.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

There is need for mass political education so as to stimulate active involvement of people in political activities.

Politicians should have respect for the democratic verdicts of the electorate at any election. Political aspirants must learn to play the game of politics by its rules.

The institutions of democracy must represent the yearnings and aspirations of Nigerians.

Security agencies need an overhaul in the areas of election monitoring and supervision.

Undue political interference in the affairs of the INEC is not a good omen if Nigeria is to be regarded as a truly sustainable democracy

Government should improve the welfare of the judiciary staff to enable them carry out their statutory responsibilities effectively without fear or favour.

It is important that the state realize the significance of creating an enabling environment of justice and equity, a system where the rule of law is the catchword of the political actors. By these means, unwholesome activities of party patrons would be checkmated

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