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Analyzing Electoral Misconduct: The Case of 2019 General Elections in Gombe State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Credible election is fast becoming a feature of the democratic process canvassed globally. However, misconducts still mar the exercise and smooth transition in a couple of countries, including Nigeria. This study focused on electoral misconducts reported during Nigeria's 2019 general elections, using Gombe State as reference. Data were collected through primary and secondary sources, which involved questionnaire administration, interviews and desk review of published works relevant to the paper. The findings revealed that there were electoral misconducts in several areas during the 2019 general elections not only in Gombe Metropolis but in other parts of the State. These misconducts ranged from vote buying, to material inducements and destructions of election materials, among others. The study recommends the need for a new electoral law that will criminalise vote buying and other sundry electoral frauds in future elections in Gombe and other parts of the country.

Keywords: Credible election, bribery, electoral fraud, vote buying, electoral law

Introduction

Credible election is fast becoming a global democratic process. Free, fair and credible elections provide for legitimate and accountable leaders and genuine democratic government (Abdullahi, 2004). Election enables eligible voters to periodically and effectively use their ballots to freely choose credible ones to represent them in government on one hand, and vote out bad leaders on the other. The method of voting could either be open secret ballot system or open ballot system (option A4- once adopted in Nigeria by the electoral commission). Open secret ballot system allows potential voter to be accredited

before receiving a ballot paper from election management body official and confidentially thumb print the ballot for his/her appropriate choice of candidate/party into a secret voting compartment. In this system, the election management officials, security and party agents monitor the process to ensure fair play. On the other hand, the modified option A4 enables prospective voters to queue behind a candidate photograph or party symbol of their choice and the voters are physically counted in such manner and the results are officially declared by the electoral management officials in presence of security officials and party agents. This system was utilized during 1993 general elections in Nigeria.

However, misconduct in Nigeria's electoral process negates the requirement and opportunity for citizens to use their ballots to elect their leaders. This tends to impede the smooth democratic transition and acceptability of official declaration of a winner and sometimes elicit violent protest. The 1999 and 2003 general elections in Nigeria were tainted with various electoral fraud and other irregularities including vote buying, under age voting, multiple voting, hijacking of ballot boxes and ballot papers stuffing. Thus, Chizea (2004: 58) asserts that:

Nigeria held an election that was marred by irregularities in 1999 but the public sentiments for the quick return of the military to the barracks made them to accept the result...The 2003 elections can hardly be classified as credible. (Chizea, 2004: 58)

Electoral misconduct in the 2019 general elections in Nigeria has taken several dimensions and manifested in many forms, such as greed, lack of transparency in the electoral system thereby, limiting competition directed towards promoting private interests, vote buying, bribery, inducement and violence (Haruna, Okunola & Ocheme, 2018). It occurs at the beginning of election, during or after elections, especially during tribunal cases to determine the outcome of an election.

It is against the above background that this paper studies electoral misconduct in the Nigeria's 2019 general elections. The study aims to specifically examine the nature, causes and implications of electoral misconducts in Nigeria's electoral process with reference to Gombe State.

The Issue

The previous general elections (1999, 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015) conducted in Nigeria were largely flawed by varying degrees of electoral misconducts including underage voting, vote buying, snatching of ballot boxes and result manipulations. These fraudulent acts marred the credibility and acceptability of the election results (Udu, 2015; Suberu, 2007; International Crisis Group, 2007; Jega, 2007). Considering the spate of misconducts in Nigeria's previous electoral process, this present study examines the electoral misconducts in

2019 general elections, so as to stem the tide of the trends in the country's future elections.

Literature Review

Existing studies have highlighted different forms, causes and consequences of electoral misconducts in Nigeria. According to the existing studies, there are three forms of electoral misconducts in Nigeria. These occur during pre-election period, election time and post-election era (Ugwuja, 2015; Olawole, Adewunmi & Oluwole, 2013; Norris, 2012; Birch, 2009). These electoral misconducts occur in three phases:

- The first phase is manipulation of rules. This occurs when electoral laws are distorted so as to favour a particular candidate in an election. For instance, it occurs when names of eligible voters are deliberately omitted from voters' register in order to prevent the voters from voting during election.
- The second phase is manipulation of voters. This occurs either to distort voters' preferences or to sway preference expression. The formal involves illicit forms of campaign tactics that are deceptive and violate campaign finance laws or severe bias in media coverage of the election, while the later consists of alteration of how preferences are expressed at the polling station, through vote-buying or intimidation aimed at increasing the vote of a particular candidate or political party (Isma'ila & Othman, 2016).
- The third phase is voting manipulation (manipulation of election results). This consists of electoral mishandlings including ballot-box stuffing, misreporting, under-provision of voting facilities in opposition strongholds, lack of transparency in the organization of the election, bias in the way electoral disputes are adjudicated in electoral tribunals, etc. (Birch, 2009).

Some studies have also addressed the probable causes of misconducts in Nigerian elections. Ajie & Wokekoro (2012) posit that frail government institutions, inefficient legal system, lack of transparency, high incidence of poverty due to unemployment and political interference on the operations of anti-corruption agencies are the major causes of electoral misconducts in Nigeria. Similarly, Adoke (2011) connotes that weak electoral laws and lack of political will for enforcement of the rule of law intensify corruption in Nigerian democracy.

There are many implications of misconducts in the electoral process. Electoral misconducts impede elections credulity in a plural society like Nigeria where ethnicity and tribes are salient in politics (Haruna, Okunola & Ocheme, 2018). Thus, irregularities in electoral process prevent a competent candidate from clinching victory in such society, as is often opposed with violent protests, litigations, ethno-religious politics and result to nepotism, high incidence of poverty and mismanagement of resources (Ebegbulem, 2011).

Electoral misconducts do not allow for political parties to grow in their structure and administration which invariably affects sustainable democracy. This often leads to collapse of the civil administration with colossal loss (Lawal, 2015).

Mukhtar, Dangiwa & Haruna (2017) and Ijewereme & Dunmade (2014) assert that electoral misconduct is often used to gain access to and sustain political mandate in Nigeria with attendant consequences of unstable economy and prevalence of poverty occasioned by high unemployment rate and incidence of insecurity of lives and property. According to the scholars, electoral misconduct poses a serious threat on peaceful coexistence, democratic norms, good governance and economic prosperity of a state or country. It disrupts accountability, transparency and quality service delivery. Misconduct in Nigeria's electoral process increases the wealth of few political office holders while the more citizenry are sinking into dehumanizing poverty (Isma'ila & Othman, 2016; Olurode, 2011).

However, the above studies focused on previous elections before the 2019 general elections in Nigeria. They are largely reflective documentary and qualitative in nature and conducted in other parts of Nigerian society rather than the present study area (Gombe State). Furthermore, considering the electoral misconducts in series of previous elections in Nigeria, the present research uniqueness stems from interrogation of stakeholders including Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) ad-hoc officials, party leaders, youth and women leaders, etc. to arrive at a reliable and inclusive solutions aimed at stemming the tide of prevalence of electoral misconducts, especially in Nigeria's future electoral process.

Theoretical Framework

A combination of social learning theory and culture of poverty thesis was adopted as the theoretical framework for the study. However, the study relies more on the culture of poverty thesis because it accounts for the character of the state in Nigeria and the role of poverty in fueling electoral misconducts in Nigeria's electoral process. The social learning theory was propounded by Bandura and Walter (1963) on the assumption that behaviour is learned and personality can be explained in terms of cumulative effects of a series of learning experiences that take place in a social context. Thus, people learn by observing others' behaviours (modelling). If the act of the learnt behaviour is positive, it will reinforce the act. Conversely, when an act is being reinforced, it is likely to be repeated again. The social learning theory is used to explain electoral misconducts in Nigeria since many people perpetrate fraud and manipulate elections' results without much concomitant trial and imprisonment of those people, who committed the acts to deter others. Consequently, those who manipulate electoral process are seen as heroes and heroines rather than being sanctioned. This encourages people to engage in such misconducts in electoral process, as humans are essentially pleasure seeking; they engage in

electoral misconducts of others seen as models, especially when they are not prosecuted or those caught and prosecuted were eventually acquitted.

Culture of poverty thesis is traced to the work of Oscar Lewis in 1966. According to Danaan (2018), the culture of poverty constitutes a pattern of life, which people adopt as a group, and is passed from one generation to another. Thus, politicians and voters do not just indulge in electoral misconducts for the fun of it. They mainly do so because of their perception of public office as the main, if not the only, avenue to become rich and relevant rather than rendering services to the public. The politicians are afraid of being poor and not relevant if they do not win in an election. This makes an average Nigerian politician to subvert elections to a “do or die” affairs thereby engaging in varying degrees of electoral misconducts including manipulation and false declaration of election results, vote buying and stuffing of ballot boxes, among others to win elections (Oshewolo, 2010; Okeke, 2005). Thus, the inability of the impoverish electorates to meet up with their everyday necessities of life makes them susceptible to sentiments and allow the politicians to buy their votes to win elections. Electoral laws are abused and manipulated for the selfish interest of politicians to win elections, so as to gain access to public fund. They continue to enriching themselves by looting from the public treasury. This tends to influence lack of accountability among Nigerian public office holders.

Materials and Methods

According to National Population Commission (NPC, 2006), Gombe State has a total population of two million, three hundred and sixty-five thousand and forty (2,365,040) people. Gombe Metropolis is the commercial hub and administrative capital of Gombe State. It is a cosmopolitan area consisting of several tribes including Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba, Igbo, Kanuri, Tera, Tangale, Bolawa and Waja tribes, who are mainly Muslims and Christians. However, the population of the study include all adult suffrages including males and females, married and single, who are residents of Gombe Metropolis. The Metropolis consists of *State Low-cost, Jekada-fari, Tumfure, Federal Low-cost, Jankai, Dawaki, BCGA, Gandu, Pantami, Bolari, Madaki, Barunde, Herwagana, Kagarawa, Unguwa Uku, Checheniya, Arewa and Tudun Wada quarters, etc.*

A total sample size of three hundred and eighty-four (384) suggested by Research Advisors (2006) as the appropriate sample size for similar population with a confidence of 95 percent and margin error of 5.0 percent was used for the study. The total sample size comprised three hundred and seventy-two respondents used to generate quantitative data and twelve participants used to obtain qualitative data. The study utilized multi-stage cluster and purposive sampling methods. At the first stage, the residential areas in Gombe Metropolis including *State Low-cost, Jekada-fari, Tumfure, Federal Low-cost, Jankai, Dawaki, BCGA, Gandu, Pantami, Bolari, Madaki, Barunde, Herwagana, Kagarawa, Unguwa Uku, Checheniya, Arewa and Tudun Wada* were identified. In the second stage, simple random sampling (lottery technique) was

used to select six residential areas in Gombe Metropolis. These residential areas include *Jekada-fari*, *Tumfure*, *Federal Low-cost*, *BCGA*, *Gandu* and *Tudun Wada*. At the third stage, sixty-two respondents were selected from the six sampled areas based on ability and willingness to provide quantitative data for the study.

Snowball sampling technique was used to identify and conduct Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with two leaders of two dominant political parties. These political parties include All Progressive Congress (APC) and People's Democratic Party (PDP) in the State, two women leaders, two youth leaders and six INEC ad-hoc officials making twelve (12) key informants to generate qualitative data.

The study utilized primary and secondary data. The primary data were obtained using quantitative and qualitative (questionnaire and interview) methods. Questionnaire items were designed in English and administered by trained research assistants recruited for the data collection exercise and were supervised by the researcher. The secondary data were materials obtained from relevant textbooks, journals, government official gazettes and other materials from credible internet sources.

Quantitative data generated were analyzed using simple frequencies and percentages obtained through Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22 software which were presented in tables. The qualitative data obtained were analyzed and used to compliment and support the quantitative data accordingly.

Findings

The findings of the study are presented below:

Table 1: Socio-economic and Demographic Variables of the Respondents

Variable		Frequency	Percentage (%)
	18-25 years	94	25.3
	26 -33 years	103	27.7
	34 years and above	175	47.0
	Total	372	100
Marital Status	Single	132	35.5
	Married	225	60.5
	Divorced	15	4.0
	Total	372	100
Education	Non Western Education	36	9.7
	Primary	51	13.7
	Secondary	136	36.6
	Post-secondary	149	40.0
	Total	372	100
Occupation	Unemployed	28	7.5
	Farmers/ Traders	196	52.7
	Government employees	46	12.4
	Private employees	102	27.4
	Total	372	100

Table 1 shows socio-economic and demographic variables of the respondents indicating that 47 percent of the respondents were between the ages of 34 years and above, 27.7 percent aged 26-33 years and 25.3 percent aged 18-25 years. Majority (60.5 percent) of the respondents were married while 35.5 percent single. Also, 40.0 percent (majority) of the respondents had post-secondary school education, 36.6 percent had secondary level of education, 13.7 percent had primary school education and 9.7 percent of the respondents had non-western education, such as Arabic/religious education. Furthermore, 52.7 percent (majority) of the respondents were farmers/traders, 27.4 percent private employees, 12.4 percent government employees and 7.5 percent unemployed.

Table 2: Nature of Misconducts in Nigeria's Electoral Process

Nature of Misconducts	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Vote buying	75	20.2
Bribery/inducement of voters	263	70.7
Snatching of ballot boxes	15	4.0
Destruction of electoral materials	19	5.1
Total	372	100

Table 2 shows responses on the nature of misconducts in Nigeria's electoral process, which include bribery/inducement of voters constituting the majority (70.7 percent), vote buying (20.2 percent), destruction of electoral materials

and snatching of ballot boxes were less with 5.1 percent and 4.0 percent, respectively. This implies that politicians engage in vote buying, bribery and inducements of voters during the 2019 general elections in Gombe Metropolis. A key informant during an interview revealed thus:

Many politicians, especially from the two leading political parties in Nigeria i.e. APC and PDP bought votes through bribery of electoral officials and inducement of electorates to win elections in the state. (*KII with a Woman Leader, 10-5-2019*)

Another key informant expressed as follows:

To be honest with you, we all engage in vote buying by giving money or material for the potential voters to vote for our party. Our political opponents also do the same. It was really like a game of highest bidders win. Also, thousands of Naira were given to electoral officials and even security personnel to secure our votes. (*KII with a Party Leader, 5-6-2019*)

Furthermore, another key informant indicated that:

Indeed, money exchanges many hands during the 2019 general elections not only in Gombe Metropolis, but in other parts of the State and Nigeria. In fact, we were given money to vote and influence other people to vote for a particular party or candidates of a party. I made some money just like many other persons during the elections. (*KII with a Youth Leader, 9-6-2019*)

Table 3: Causes of Misconducts in Nigeria's Electoral Process

Causes	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Greediness	102	27.4
Weak electoral laws	92	24.7
Fear of poverty due to lack of socio-economic security	30	8.1
Jumbo salaries and emoluments of political office holders	106	28.5
Negative value system	42	11.3
Total	372	100

Table 3 shows the causes of misconducts in Nigeria's electoral process. Thus, 28.5 percent and 27.4 percent of the respondents indicated jumbo salaries and emoluments of political office holders, and greediness as the causes of misconducts in the Nigeria's electoral process. Also, 24.7 percent and 11.3 percent of the respondents indicated weak electoral laws, and negative value system, while 8.1 percent indicated fear of poverty due to lack of socio-economic security, respectively. A key informant during the KII stated:

Although, the causes of misconducts in Nigeria's electoral process are many but the main ones are the jumbo salaries and emoluments of political office holders and greediness of Nigerian politicians. The politicians make so much money when they clinch political offices, and as such would engage in misconducts to win elections. They are also afraid of poverty if they do not win an election, as many of them take politics as life career. (*KII with INEC ad-hoc official, 13-6-2019*)

Another key informant during the interview reported that:

Our electoral laws are very weak and even if they are very strong, the electoral tribunals are not independent, as such are subjected to manipulation, especially by the party in power. They abuse laws with impunity. Greediness is another factor responsible for corruption in an election. The average Nigerian political leader is very greedy despite the too much money they make in politics; they would always want more. (*KII with Woman Leader, 10-5-2019*)

Table 4: Implications of Misconducts in Nigeria's Electoral Process

Causes	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Violent protests	88	23.7
Unacceptable electoral results	86	23.1
Poor service delivery	87	23.4
Lack of accountability and transparency	54	14.5
Prevalence of poverty and unemployment	57	15.3
Total	372	100

Table 4 indicates the implications of misconducts in Nigeria's electoral process showing that 23.7 percent, 23.1 percent and 23.4 percent of the respondents indicated violent protests, unacceptable electoral results, and poor service delivery as the consequences of electoral misconducts in Nigeria. Also, 15.3 percent and 14.5 percent indicated prevalence of poverty and unemployment and lack of accountability and transparency, respectively. A key informant during the KII expressed that:

Misconduct in Nigeria's electoral process had led to violent protests which have claimed many lives and property damaged in many parts of the Nigerian society. I could remember that the aftermath misconducts in 2011 elections led to violent protest in Kano Metropolis that resulted into many deaths and loss of property. (*KII with a Woman Leader, 10-5-2019*)

Similarly, another key informant mentioned that:

The implications of misconducts in election are many. It can lead to protest of election result that can lead to loss of lives and property. It can also lead to poor service delivery. Many Nigerian politicians cannot fulfill their promises during elections when they assume offices due to enormous misconduct, as they have used so much money to buy votes which they see as a must to recover. This impedes their service delivery which was their hallmark on the manifestos. (*KII with Youth Leader, 10-5-2019*)

Discussion of Key Findings

The findings of the study reveal that the nature of misconducts in Nigeria's electoral process includes bribery/inducement of voters by the political leaders to win elections for themselves and party members. The Nigerian politicians also sometimes snatch ballot boxes and destroy electoral materials when it is apparent that they are not likely to win elections. This is in line with Haruna, Okunola & Ocheme (2018), Isma'ila & Othman (2016) and Vickery & Shein (2012) positions that Nigerian politicians engage in different forms of electoral misconducts, such as vote buying, bribery, inducement, snatching of ballot boxes, fraud, malpractices, destruction of electoral materials and manipulation of election results, which impede the global democratic norms.

The study also reveals that the causes of corruption in Nigeria's electoral process include the jumbo salaries and emoluments of political office holders, greediness of political leaders, weak electoral laws and negative value system. It also reveals that the fear of poverty due to lack of socio-economic security makes many politicians to engage in various misconducts in an election. The findings are in line with Ajie & Wokekoro (2012) findings that weak government institutions, dysfunctional legal system and lack of transparency constitute the major causes of systemic misconduct in Nigeria's electoral process.

Furthermore, the findings of the study reveal that poverty influence electoral misconducts. This confirms culture of poverty theory that incidence of poverty in a society influence electoral misconducts. This finding also confirms Okeke's (2005) findings that Nigerian politicians subvert elections a "do or die" affairs because of fear of being poor and irrelevant in affairs of the nation thereby engaging in various degree of electoral misconducts including vote buying, stuffing of ballot boxes, false declaration of election results, etc. The findings of the study also reveal that violent protests against election results that lead to loss of lives and property, poor service delivery, mass poverty and unemployment, as many Nigerian politicians cannot fulfill their electoral promises, among others are the major end result of misconducts in Nigeria's electoral process. The findings support Ijewereme and Dunmade's (2014) findings that mass poverty, unemployment, insecurity of lives and property and poor service delivery which impede socio-economic development as the consequences of electoral misconducts, which drastically reduce the image of Nigeria among the international communities.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The incidence of misconducts in Nigeria's electoral process mar credible elections leading to smooth transition of government. Therefore, governments must do more to ensure credible electoral process, good leadership and socio-economic development as well as preventing violence during and after elections. The reaction of candidates and supporters, most especially where presumed popular parties or candidates lose elections transform to violence with its attendant consequences on lives and property. This could be prevented during 2023 general elections through the following recommendations:

- There is need for President Muhammadu Buhari to revisit and sign the new electoral law passed during the 8th Assembly to curtail further electoral misconducts, as the country prepares for 2023 general elections. Thus, the electoral tribunals should be independent and empowered to effectively tackle election related misconducts in Nigeria.
- Electoral misconducts should be criminalized and people who engage in such acts should be arrested and prosecuted in appropriate courts. The perpetrators that are found guilty of such acts should be penalized adequately with both prison terms and fines to serve as deterrence to others.
- Political offices should be made less rewarding by reducing high paid salaries and entitlements attached to the offices. This is because the entitlements encourage politics of "must win" which occasionally lead to electoral protests, kidnappings and assassinations.
- Governments should stem the tide of the incidence of poverty in Nigerian society that influence both the politicians and electorates to engaging in electoral misconducts. This could be done through enduring welfare services and people oriented poverty alleviation programmes.

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