

## **ELECTORAL MALPRACTICE AS A CHALLENGE TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study is a descriptive one. It examines the motives behind electoral malpractice in Nigeria, finds out the factors that aid the act in the study area, and discusses the consequences of electoral malpractice on the country's sustainable development. It relied on secondary data that were content analysed. The study found that crave for power, attitude of the politicians who see politics as investment, vengeance and preponderance of seeing electoral periods as pay-back times are some of the motives for engaging in electoral malpractice. Additionally, poverty, lack or poor political education, bribery and corruption, and inadequate planning on the part of political parties/candidates are some of the factors responsible for electoral malpractice. The study also found that electoral malpractice slows down development, breeds violence and destroys the image of Nigeria. The study further draws implications of electoral malpractice for the Nigerian state. As ways out of the challenge, there is need for more political education by National Orientation Agency and Independent National Electoral Commission, institution of electoral-courts, and thorough enforcement of the electoral act, making the electoral body truly autonomous and putting of appropriate legislation in place to punish offenders in order to overcome some of the havocs electoral malpractice wrecks in Nigeria.*

**KEYWORDS:** election, electoral malpractice, development, electoral courts, violence

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Electoral malpractice poses serious challenge to, and undermines the development of Nigeria. The act is often in the form of multiple registrations of voters, buying and selling of voter's card, bribing of electoral officials, hoarding of registration materials and adoption of other crude and cunning methods of cheating political opponents (Adeola, 2012; Shelly, 2019). Electoral malpractice is a threat to the development of Nigeria in that politicians, electorate, security agents and the electoral body engage in the unscrupulous act. Oshin (2013) notes that the judiciary, that supposed to be the hope of the cheated is at times used by the perpetrators to uphold the atrocities they have committed during elections. As a result of this challenge, to choose leaders at different levels of government in Nigeria through a free, fair and credible election has become a difficult task (Adeola, 2012).

Even when the 2011, 2015 and 2019 general elections in Nigeria have been perceived to be "somehow" better compared to that of 1999, 2003 and 2007 general elections, yet elections and electoral processes in Nigeria cannot be said to be credible as to determine Nigeria's transition of power. Crises from electoral malpractice have culminated in the famous 'operation-wetie'

in the western part of Nigeria among the Yorubas in the first republic. According to Ejigbile (2015), scores of innocent Nigerians were killed and a lot of properties destroyed in Kano, Bauchi, Plateau and Kastina States due to allegation of electoral fraud during the result of 2011 general elections. Electoral malpractice has high tendency to orchestrate violence and hooliganism, and on the long run have retrogressive effect on the development of Nigeria.

As noted by Oshin (2013), the proliferation of small arms like hand guns, rifles, grenades, machine guns and other dangerous devices empower the youth to engage in violence, thereby posing security risk to the corporate image of the country. Violence orchestrated by electoral malpractice is inimical to the development, progress, unity and peaceful co-existence of Nigeria, and further drains the purse of the country. In 2011 in Osun State, allegation of electoral malpractice between the Action Congress (AC) gubernatorial candidate, Mr. Rauf Aregbesola and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) counterpart, Prince Olagunsoye Oyinlola heralded protests from AC supporters in Osogbo and Ilesa after the alleged loss of the election to PDP. As observed by Adeleke (2014), houses and cars of some notable PDP leaders were burnt as a result of electoral malpractice perceived to have been used to scheme out the major opposition party – the AC, away from power. After the Action Congress candidate has been declared winner by the Appeal Court that sat in Ibadan, the AC supporters used the avenue to take revenge on the supporters and leaders of PDP. Several people were beaten to a pulp while some kings were victims of this unwholesome scenario. Adeleke reports that the Oba Alamo of Ayegbaju was helplessly beaten at Ilesa, the home town of the then Governor of Osun State, Mr. Rauf Aregbesola (Moshood, 2012).

Another dimension to electoral malpractice is the issue of ‘inconclusive election’. The new terminology into the country’s electoral system dated back to the Osun state gubernatorial rerun, where about seven polling units were recorded to have witnessed major disruption culminated in cancellation of the votes earlier cast in those polling units. Thus, polling unit where major violence erupts, votes cast in such circumstances would be canceled and a rerun election reordered. When total number of cancelled votes are more than the total number of ‘lead votes’, such election is inconclusive. It can thus be said that when election is inconclusive as a result of crises arising from malpractice, another one must be held at a later date in the form of ‘repeat votes’ before a winner can emerge. It thus has cost implication on the part of the country while economic activities in such areas are often hampered. Unfortunately, Nigeria is yet to have elections where those not affected by any rerun will be civil. In fact, most rerun elections with earlier colouration of malpractice are held in apprehension (Shelly, 2019).

As a result of the aforementioned anomalies and several others due to electoral malpractice, the objectives of this study are to:

- i. examine the motives behind electoral malpractice in Nigeria;
- ii. discuss the factors that aid electoral malpractice in the country; and
- iii. find out the consequences posed by electoral malpractice on the development of Nigeria

### **Conceptualizations**

Election is the act of electing candidates to represent the people of a given country into the parliament, executive and possibly other areas of government. Darry (2009) opines that election is the most democratic means by which people choose their representatives. If it is free and fair, it encourages healthy competition, political participation, accountability and serves as

means to change government peacefully. It can also be an avenue to test the popularity of a government and check its excessiveness, or member of the parliament or political party. Election can be direct or indirect. Whichever form it takes, it is an avenue for democratic consolidation and good governance as long as it is free and fair.

Electoral malpractice connotes all forms of wrong doing to truncate fairness in the electoral processes. It is usually aimed at giving unmerited favour to, or promotes the interest of a particular candidate or party. It is also viewed by Boye (2006) as a fraudulent act of manipulating election result with the aim of increasing the votes share or chances of a rival candidate at winning an election. The magnitude of electoral malpractice differs from one political party to another and desperation with which a political party or candidate anticipates its/his victory. One major way to perpetrate electoral malpractice is through multiple registrations. In this process, a single person can register more than once, either with different names in the same registration unit or using the same name at different polling units. In either case, the purpose is to be able to vote more than once on Election Day. Although, this fraud has been addressed in the 2015 general election in Nigeria, yet the newly introduced 'card-reader machines' could not effectively detect the fraud due to what Independent National Electoral Commission(INEC) tagged 'technical hitch' (Bola, 2015).

In another dimension, some Nigerians offer voter's cards for sale to politicians, even when the 2010 Electoral Act frowns at this. There is also ballot-stuffing, where ballot boxes already filled with thumb printed ballot papers are exchanged with those used at the voting centers (Adeola, 2012). Most times too, electoral malpractice takes the form of thuggery and hooliganism. This can result in cheating, killing, looting and assassination of political opponents. The use of thugs and hooligans is not peculiar to Nigeria except in style and crudity (Boye, 2006). Hooliganism and thuggery are bad because they change the conception of politics from being a service to humanity to that of war.

The use of thugs and hooligans by politicians in Nigeria is dated to the first republic in the western region, where members of Action Group that were loyal to late Chief Obafemi Awolowo and the split away group of late Chief Ladoke Akintola were scheming to outwit one another in the regional election slated for 1964/65. In the fourth republic, Dr. Chris Ngige of Anambra State was abducted by thugs of his godfather in 2003 (Egwu, 2007). Prominent gubernatorial candidates like Dr. Ayodeji Daramola and Funso Williams were gunned down by unknown assailants in Ekiti and Lagos States. The killing of late Chief Bola Ige, who was a serving Attorney General and Minister of Justice under Chief Olusegun Obasanjo could not be divorced from electoral malpractice especially as a result of his strong political weight in the western part of Nigeria. It is no surprise to see thugs brandishing weapons openly at political gatherings to the full glare of security operatives, who sometimes watch helplessly when these thugs harass and intimidate political opponents of their 'masters'. The use of such power with impunity has led to disruption of campaigns, rallies, elections and creation of fear and apprehension in the minds of the weaker political group. It is suspected that the political leadership of Nigeria is responsible for the evil; hence no serious condemnation has been heard from it (Ogunmola, 2008).

Development is an increased capacity of growth from one stage to another. It is usually measured in terms of growth and per capital income, improved technology, good standard of

living, level of education and investment within the economy. Development in this concept denotes ability to develop a state of mind that will embrace fairness, fair play, openness, equity and eschew violence, thuggery, killing, kidnapping, arson, intimidation and criminalities in the conduct of election. It is a way by which stakeholders display civil and acceptable attitudinal disposition to election and its outcomes. Development in this study means ability to advance the cause of election and its ideals for the mutual benefit of the people. In their own view, Shaw and Heard (1982) argue that a popular conception of the goal of development is that development is the change by which poor countries catch up with rich ones.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The ethical theory of Androx Fox (1952) which is otherwise called moral philosophy is relevant in explaining electoral malpractice as unhelpful to development. This theory points out the moral obligations, the rightness or wrongness and the ideals towards which man is working. The position of this theory is that any action in the sphere of politics involves the question of whether the action is right or wrong. According to Fox, what is morally wrong can never be politically right. In effect, if we apply this assertion, we can say that development is conditioned by ethics. In contrast, Nicollo Machiavelli and others are of the view that ethics has no place in politics. This, according to Machiavelli and his adherents is because the end justifies the means.

The issues of 'rightness' and 'wrongness' are relative terms to electoral malpractice and should be viewed in that light, yet, the state exists to promote desirable political acts that will usher development, improve the welfare of the citizen, which are within the purview of ethics. This explains why states of the world including Nigeria formulate rules that ban criminalities like kidnapping, killing and intimidation which are considered morally wrong. We can then conclude that as long as politics is concerned with the question of 'ought-to-be', it has contact with ethics. From the above analysis, a number of actions like electoral rigging, killing of opponent to have electoral edge, double registration, ballot snatching, inflation of electoral votes, violence during campaigns and arson are all morally wrong. Hence, equity, fair play, transparency and openness are qualities that are morally good, embraced and capable of enhancing a nation's development.

### **Motives behind Electoral Malpractice**

By motives, we mean the pull and push reasons that predispose politicians to embrace electoral malpractice. Psychologists and political scientists have delved into finding out reasons behind this and the following constitute the argument in its favour. Crave for power is one of such reasons. According to Adeola (2012), power is sweet and virtually every politician desires to possess it. Thus, many politicians who hold elective post(s) would not want to lose it and might employ crude means to retain such position(s). Some new breed politicians often equally wish to have a grasp of power and also use any means to have it including exploring option of electoral malpractice. The desperation for power is not unconnected with the way virtually everything is becoming 'political' in Nigeria. This is why people want to be relevant in the scheme of things as well, including amassing of the national wealth through victory in election. Such politicians then use any means to have power no matter how odd such means might appear.

Some Nigerians see politics as investment and this account for desperation on the part of some politicians to desperately rig in their way. Also, for some politicians who do not have specific job, electoral malpractice is inevitable, because politics to them is a full-time job. This is why the desperation to rule is paramount to many politicians. Even those that have jobs wish to be in political positions as a result of the huge pay attached to political positions in the country. No doubt, the huge pay given to politicians is an inducement capable of making them rig their way into such political positions. Godfathers in Nigeria also specialize in sponsoring people to elective positions with a view to making more gains (Egwu, 2007). They also engage in rigging to realize their ulterior political motives. As at now, nobody can say what a senator or a member of the House of Representatives takes as salary. According to Shehu Sanni, a former senator from Kaduna state, a serving senator goes home with about thirty million and five hundred thousand monthly (Shehu, 2019). Although, this is not individual salary per se but inclusive of constituency allowances, yet it is assumed that larger percentage of the sum ends in individual pocket because not much has been commensurably done in exchange for past payments to the lawmakers.

In addition, most politicians have wrong electoral attitude. The wrong attitude includes winning election at all cost, and instrument of force. The conclusion before some candidates contest elections is that they 'must' emerge victorious no matter what it would take. They usually look at electoral contest from one angle – winning at all cost. Because of such people's poor spirit of sportsmanship, they do not see politics as a game. In the light of this, loss to such people is an abomination or a shame, whereas it is not. As a result of this wrong mentality, they do whatever they could to ensure they win.

The trend of ceaseless rigging is also responsible for the bad act. Politicians that have robbed electorally in the past, emerged victorious through a rigged electoral process, and got away with the fraud may find it difficult not to do such thing again. In other words, people that have won elections through compromised processes in the past, other things being equal, may not do away with the act if he is not stopped. In addition, those that have not done it before may likely want to try it 'if only once' like their unfaithful political opponents. It becomes painful and the desperation to rig becomes higher and competitive when those that have hitherto lost begin to hear revelations of how they were rigged out by some party members that were responsible for their past woes (Moshood, 2012).

On a final note, some Nigerians are already embedded with a negative mindset- that fairness and justice would continue to be a mirage. It is instructive to note that because many up-coming politicians have not seen 'crooks' being jailed, their belief is that crudity in electoral processes must continue. Politicians that have gotten to exalted elective positions through crude means find it difficult to work against the bad process that produced them. Many, who have made their money by wrongfully occupying elective political positions appear as good models to the young ones. They are deeply celebrated and this is why Nigerian youths find it difficult to do away with electoral malpractice.

### **Factors Responsible for High Rate of Electoral Malpractice in Nigeria**

Endemic poverty is one of the factors that responsible for electoral malpractice. More than half of the people that engage in the bad act find it difficult to comfortably eat what they like, dress

well or live in a house they like (Egwu, 2007). Virtually all the basic needs of life are difficult for them to attain because of their poor economic condition. As a result, they become ready-made tools that can be used for any horrible assignment no matter how terrible, delicate or lawless it is so as to survive. They do not also care about the pain such act can inflict on the development of Nigeria. At times, when their services are not sought, highly poverty-ridden youths want to impress their master by doing the 'uncommon' (perpetuating electoral malpractice) as a 'good' boy. As at 2019, about 68.7 per cent of Nigerian graduates are unemployed while over 50 percent live under average economic wellbeing (Medee, 2019). Thus, it is not unlikely for such poverty-ridden and unemployed Nigerians to quickly embrace the dangerous option of rigging election in exchange for survival.

Inadequate planning is also responsible for electoral malpractice. This is the case when political parties or candidates do not sufficiently prepare for elections. When there is no enough readiness in term of a party/candidate's sale of manifestoes. It can also be in the form of shoddy allocation of money to campaigns and visible steps that are capable of catching votes. As a result, such party or candidate would want to engage in manipulation of the electoral process to be ahead of others without addressing the areas of lapses or deficiency. In Nigeria, larger members of political parties are 'floating', who only engage in campaigns or attend party rallies for pecuniary gains. Most times, such uncommitted members can go extra miles when their expectations are not met. There are others, who keep all resources meant to mobilize voters ahead of elections, but still wish to give good impression to the party or candidate that have mobilized them that they are loyal supporters. What they in such circumstance is to engage in rigging of any form to compensate for the material things earlier collected. The aftermath outburst is to plan to rig election as cover up.

In addition, when the nomination of a party/candidate is imposed and not acceptable to the electorate electoral malpractice may be witnessed. All candidates and political parties are always out to win votes; they would wish to catch votes even when they know that they are not embraced by the people (Ejigbile, 2015). Put differently, a candidate that is not marketable because he or she is imposed may consider the option of engaging in electoral malpractice if possible. In a way, several factions sometimes emerge from a political party after primary election. Some factions split away to join another political party. Such decamped members may also worked against the imposed candidate and do every possible thing to rig him out.

Electoral malpractice can also be induced by bribery and corruption. Some people believe that 'nothing is impossible' with the use of money which often induce electoral malpractice. The wrong mentality makes some politicians to assume that they can emerge victorious in elections even when they are not 'serious' contenders. The only opportunity such politicians rely upon is to share money and/or other items as bait during election. In addition, some of such politicians and their supporters recruit 'militia' to rig for them. It is also not new to see electorate collecting money and some other items but refuse to vote for such party/candidate. When this is the case, anything can be done on election-day as "pay off act" to those that have been materially induced but showing indication of not doing the bidding of the giver.

Electoral malpractice is also facilitated by absence of, or poor political education. Political education is a necessity precursor to reduce electoral manipulation. When this is not sufficiently done, shoddily done or done at inappropriate time, then the result is always unpalatable. Hence,

it is a necessity to regularly keep politicians and political parties informed of the nitty-gritty of elections to keep the electoral process sacrosanct, neat, free and fair.

Absence of confidence in the system equally brews suspicion and malpractice. In Nigeria, there is always a mutual suspicion among political parties. This tends to keep the political situation heated and susceptible to manipulation. This is not uncommon when electoral umpire is seen as not being apolitical. In this circumstance, all political parties would want to undo one another so as to be in the reign of government. In Nigeria, it has been severally debated that electoral management body serves the incumbent or ruling party. Therefore, when election is forthcoming, opposition parties assume that the electoral umpire will 'in a way' work to favour the ruling political party. In view of this, they equally sometimes prepare to compromise the electoral processes in a way to gain undue favour.

### **Consequences of Electoral Malpractice on the Development of Nigeria**

The act of rigging, ballot stuffing, gerrymandering, thuggery, hooliganism and other malpractices have implications for the development of Nigeria. Chaos, violence and anarchy can erupt in the political scene when people felt cheated in the electoral process. Experiences from 2007 and 2011 post-election crises in Osun, Ondo, Oyo, Kano, Bauchi and some other states gave credence to this position (Ejigbile, 2015). In the process of political disturbances linked to electoral malpractice, lives are lost, properties that worth millions of naira are destroyed. There can also be arson, looting, displacement of families and turmoil among the people. People of the same blood can see each other as enemy. All these on the long run are capable of drawing a state back from its pursued growth and developmental plan.

Besides, electoral materials such as polling cubicle, ballot boxes, voters register; electoral forms and ballot papers can be destroyed. The destruction can be by either angrily tearing them to pieces or setting them ablaze entirely. During the gubernatorial and National Assembly in 2019, a number of electoral materials were reportedly damaged in Lagos state by hoodlums in many polling centres. In the process, votes already cast, ballot boxes, tables and unused ballot papers and forms were burnt. This, no doubt, is a waste to the national purse as those materials would need to be replaced for future use.

Electoral malpractice is a barrier to the achievement and attainment of a stable constitutional democracy in Nigeria. The thugs and hooligans that are recruited for electoral malpractice can divert their weapons to other crimes such as arm robbery, which has resulted in terrorism and banditry. All these hamper growth as development does not thrive in an atmosphere where chaos and violence exist. By implication, violence is ingrained into the psyche of Nigerians and this in turn has retrogressive impact on the development of Nigeria. Using Nigerian youth for thuggery and hooliganism is inimical to the development, progress, unity and peaceful co-existence of Nigeria. It is not an understatement to say that terrorism, militia, and insurgency are well linked to recruitment for electoral malpractice in some parts of Nigeria. To combat the vices has drained the country of its financial resources and reduction in foreign reserves.

### **Implications of Electoral Malpractice for Nigerian State**

Given the nature of partisan politics during election periods in Nigeria, desperation for power, and level of poverty, insecurity and unemployment; it is germane that this study draws the implications so as to find a way to get out of the menace. The Nigerian state is currently grappling with poverty with more than 67.3% of its citizenry in abject poverty (Adelley, 2020). For now, the current wave of poverty across all ages in Nigeria is alarming and calls for financial commitment on the part of government. This implies that the country needs to block all ways to forestall duplication of the conduct of elections. On the overall, national resources (earnings) could then be used for matters that can enhance wellbeing of Nigerians. By all means, a way to prevent all sundry avenues of tampering with electoral processes should be sought. Money that is likely to be diverted for conduct of another elections occasioned by malpractice can be utilized for the country's poverty eradication programmes.

Related to the above is the issue of unemployment. With the current population of Nigeria informally put at close to one hundred and eighty (180) millions, and more than two-third unemployed; it is not logical to continue to waste a kobo from Nigerian purse. Thus, if effort is made to prevent deliberate way of calling for reelection, monies that are likely to be earmarked for such exercise could be used for provision of menial jobs. This is plausible, going by the position of Shortall (2019) that not all unemployed people across all nations of the world need huge fund to survive.

In a way, the issue of electoral malpractice still implies on the state's insecurity. The Nigerian government decimates expenditure on securing lives and property of Nigerians when tackling electoral malpractice. It then implicate that instead of making the check a corrective effort, it should be preventive. As remarked by Osetelu (2019), reasonable arms that the Nigerian government deployed for successive elections in the past erroneously ended up in wrong hands. A lot of desperate Nigerian jostles for arms to rig elections. If we then go by the above position, effort deployed in tackling electoral related security amounts to equipping hoodlums with arms and ammunitions from the state amours. In all circumstances, it is time that the Nigerian government braces up to prevent all manners of scheming the electoral process. Stakeholders inclusive of partisan politicians and electorate need to be visible good example in this regard. Nigerian state will be in motion without movement, if by 2023; when the next general election is coming up, the country is still on the rhetoric of what steps to take in order to prevent electoral malpractice. This would be a gory tale. God forbids.

### **Recommendations**

Having established that electoral malpractice is prevalent and retards development in Nigeria, the following are therefore offered with a view to suppress to the barest minimum the negative consequences of the malaise. One, there is need for more political education of both politicians and the electorates. Everybody needs to be more informed by Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC through the mass media and other means of sensitization on the need to do away with the evils of electoral malpractice. INEC needs to harp more on the chaos, untimely death, destruction of lives and properties and many other evils that electoral malpractice have wreaked on Nigerians.



Just like it has been argued elsewhere, it is high time Nigeria institute electoral-courts where only electoral related matters would be resolved. Politicians who engage in electoral malpractice could be banned or imprisoned to serve as detriment to others. Electoral-courts should be put in place and given the necessary legislative approval to empower them. The judiciary should try to demonstrate more transparency and honesty in the discharge of its duties. Judges that have been found to be politically in differential should be shown the way out. A way of appreciating worthy and credible judges who perform their duties with fear of God, fairness and equity should be put in place.

The 2010 Electoral Act, as amended, which mandates electoral officials to be non-partisan should be further enforced. The way those that are guilty of electioneering malpractice during the 2015 and 2019 general elections were tried is a good starting point for INEC. The commission could do more. Unfortunately, cases involving the rulling party are atimes treated with kid gloves. Any electoral officer that are caught accepting bribe, gratification or other inducements from politicians should be tried appropriately and anybody found guilty should be out rightly jailed. The open way with which INEC officials who were alleged to have collected bribes to compromise the electoral process across states in Nigeria were handed over to Economic and Financial Crimes Commission for trial is encouraging, and needs to be sustained.

Security agents detailed to work with electoral commission should be faithful, honest and fair to all parties in the discharge of their assignments. They should learn to be civil with the use of guns, tear gas or any other weapon at their disposal. They should be withdrawn from serving as aides to politicians as much as possible few weeks to the date(s) of election so that politician would not be able to use them for personal benefits. Serious sanctions should await any politician and security operative who flout such order.

Government at all levels should try to allow the electoral commission to be more autonomous. This should be in funding, recruitment and responsibility. The budgetary provision of the electoral commission should be adequate for it to do its works easily. Politicians should be banned from influencing the recruitment of ad-hoc staff with the necessary legislations, including the application of existing ones. The current use of public universities staff as collation and returning officers is laudable on the part of INEC and should be strengthened. A way of adapting it to lower level elections should be fashioned out. Returning officers who were alleged to have collected money during the 2019 general elections should not be spared. The use of social media that frequently post unverified results should be banned with appropriate legislations.

For electoral malpractice to be seriously addressed, government at all levels need to jointly combat corruption, poverty and unemployment. The evil of the trio is so serious and injurious to electoral malpractice. Except corruption is seriously tackled, no development is likely to be seen. Poverty makes people to do anything including engagement in electoral malpractice and needs to be genuinely confronted.

Hunger can make people to misbehave and engage in absurdities. To address unemployment, Nigeria needs to embark on creation of jobs. School curriculum that will make people to become skilful as been currently canvassed by federal government in Nigeria needs to be pursued with zeal. It is necessary that government commit enough funds to its poverty eradication programmes.

## CONCLUSION

Electoral malpractice is antithetical to the development of Nigeria. Although, a lot of efforts have been made at different levels to address the ugly scenario, yet the battle is not yet won. Hence, politicians, electorates, government at all levels, civil society groups, mass media and religious associations need to do more and work hand-in-hand to ensure that the challenge is tackled. Nigeria has a lot of prospects if its electoral processes are insulated with public confidence.

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