

**ELECTION MANAGEMENT AND THE CHALLENGE OF
ELECTORAL CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA'S 2015 GENERAL
ELECTIONS**

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ABSTRACT

The conduct of free, fair and credible elections in Nigeria has always been problematic due largely to the challenges of corruption. Corruption, no doubt, is a cankerworm that has permeated Nigeria's national life. One of the elements of election is its periodicity. In fact, this is one of the foundations upon which good governance is erected. It is also the hallmark of democracy which guarantees citizens' effective participation in the political process. A truly independent, non-partisan and incorruptible electoral management body is synonymous with credible elections. However, the impartiality and integrity of the various electoral commissions in Nigeria over the years have been called to question due to the alleged romance of the electoral bodies with the ruling party with a view to conferring undue advantage on it during elections. To achieve this, some staff of the electoral bodies is compromised by the ruling party officials by offering them bribes to do their bidding. Such an attitude has major implications on the electoral process and ultimately on good governance as in most cases the legitimacy of such public officers produced through this method is always called to question. The objective of the study is to assess the causes and impacts of electoral corruption on Nigeria's electoral system. The paper adopts descriptive and historical approaches. The paper argues that the endemic corruption in every facet of the Nigerian life is a major challenge to the credibility of electoral commission; undermines its integrity and its service delivery functions. It is the contention of this paper that since the election is the springboard of good governance, those managing the process must be honest and credible and there is the need to reorientate them accordingly. Efforts must be geared towards reducing the level of poverty in the country to sanitize the electoral system against corruption.

Keywords: Corruption, Credibility, Electoral Commission, Electoral Corruption, Election Management

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Electoral democracy in Nigeria started with the introduction of the elective principle into the 1922 Clifford constitution that provided for four elective seats in the legislative council. The principle, though limited to the city of Lagos and Calabar was a watershed in citizen participation in government and leadership selection in Nigeria history. Since then, the frontier of democracy which is government by popular participation has expanded to all nooks and crannies of the country. In spite of the irregularities and incessant military intervention in government, series of elections were conducted between 1923-2015. Election management functions have been the responsibilities of the electoral commission established by law to handle all activities encompassed in the electoral cycle. "Periodic elections if carefully, freely and fairly undertaken gives legitimacy to the government and holds the promise of stabilizing political institutions most especially in a multi-ethnic nation like Nigeria" (Salahu, 2003:22). The violence, fraud, hate speeches and other vices bedeviling electoral process in Nigeria can be traced to some of the inadequacies of the electoral management body who cannot be said to be above board in the discharge of their functions. This manifest

when elections are conducted but peoples' vote does not count, or people have no choice in their representatives and leaders due to subversion or manipulation of the entire electoral process, either by individuals, groups, political parties or electoral umpire in what could be referred to as electoral corruption (Salahu, 2015:257).

This manifests mostly when the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in connivance with the government and influential members of the ruling party located polling units in residential houses of powerful party members. Consequently, the sanctity and security of ballot papers became suspicious as it was reported of people having access to the ballot papers and boxes prior to election period (ibid)

Independent National Electoral Commission most of the time becomes a tool in the hands of the ruling party to retain power at all cost. INEC in collaboration with ruling party registered more political parties to weaken strong opposition (Salahu, 2015:263). He further stated that the questionable success of the ruling party most time was attained through the rigging, ballot box stuffing, falsification of results, intimidation of opposition and voters, a direct assault on people and declaration of results where election did not take place (Salahu, 2015:263). The use of security operatives to vilify opposition and result to vote to buy by political parties "Dibo Kosebe" (vote and cook soup) a concept developed and institutionalized during the governorship elections in Edo, Ondo and Ekiti States under the watchful eyes of security agencies is the height of electoral corruption in the country.

Can there ever be a credible, free and fair election in the system lading with corruption? In what could be termed the circle of corruption the Guardian editorial of Nov 2016 said "there is corruption in the electoral process, in election petition tribunal, in the governance process, in the regulatory system of managing corruption. Corruption is even alleged in the leadership of the anti-corruption agency (Guardian Editorial Nov. 4, 2016). The confession of INEC about the complicity of its officials in the 2015 elections fraud and the bribery allegation against INEC officials in the December 2016 re-run election in River State lends credence to this assertion.

It is in the light of the foregoing that the paper is designed to interrogate the challenges of electoral corruption in the management of the 2015 general elections and the implications on the conduct of free, fair, credible and acceptable elections in Nigeria. The paper is arranged into the following sections. Introduction, conceptual clarifications, the Independent National Electoral Commission, corruption in the electoral process, the causes of electoral corruption in Nigeria, implications of electoral corruption on Nigeria democracy concluding remarks and recommendations.

2.0 CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Certain concepts are critical to the understanding of this subject matter which must be properly conceptualized. They are Election Management, corruption, and Electoral Corruption and vote buying.

3.0 ELECTION MANAGEMENT

Election management simply means the organization of all stages of the electoral process. It involves the planning, organization, and conduct of elections (Ajayi, 2007:1). It is the process of managing the affairs of voting, voting patterns and electoral reforms to ensure smooth and credible elections. It includes how elections are run, ranging from preparation for the election from the point of voters' registration to the point when winners of various positions are declared and certificate of return issue to the winners (Moveh, 2012:25).

4.0 CORRUPTION

Corruption is a global problem that exists in varying degrees in different countries (Agbu, 2003) and Nigeria has the largest share of its own as corruption has permeated all facet of Nigeria social-economic and political landscape. Confirming this argument (Omilusi, 2017: 39) posted that for nearly two decades now, Nigeria has been named among the 10 most corrupt nations in the world by the internationally recognized anti-corruption organization. The menace no doubt is seen as one of the factors that pose a serious threat to the social, economic and political development of the nation (Osaghae, 1995, Johnson, 1991). Different scholars have defined corruption differently but the central focus is around betrayal of public trust. (Dobel, 1978) defines corruption as the betrayal of public trust for individual or groups gain, while (Obayelu, 2007) extended the concept to the acquisition of wealth or power through illegal means for private gain at public expense; or a misuse of public power for private benefit. Corruption is the abuse of public power for private gains and has crippling effects on development and human welfare (Ackerman,2012), (Ruzindana, 1999) asserts that corruption in Africa is a problem of routine deviation from established standards and norms by public officials and parties with whom they interact. Corruption in the form of bribes and power directly or indirectly is present in all the department and areas of many developed and developing countries. So corruption in the electoral system could be regarded as one of the abuse of trust by stakeholders in the electoral process.

5.0 ELECTORAL CORRUPTION

This concept has been variously described by scholars. It is all actions or inactions of individuals, groups or institutions in aiding, abating and subversion of electoral process either by use of words, media (print or electronics), thugs, violence, money and state apparatus to

confer undue advantage on oneself, acquaintance or political party (Salahu, 2015:258). Citing copiously from the Encyclopedia Britannica (1980:534), Bello-Imam (2007) posited that there are several ways in which electoral processes can be vitiated. The most significant of these is corruption.

Corruption of electoral practices is of course, not limited to bribery or intimidation of the individual voter. The possibilities are endless, ranging from the dissemination of scurrilous rumours about candidates, and deliberate false campaign propaganda, to tampering with the election machinery by stuffing the ballot box with fraudulent returns, dishonest counting or reporting of votes, and total disregard of electoral outcomes by incumbent officeholders (Bello-Imam 2007).

Corruption undercuts the country's ability to provide essential infrastructure, it is stifling development and affecting governance. This must have informed Omotoso to argue that:

Electoral corruption involves the use of political power to manipulate the political process and established rules of contest, value allocation etc. This manifests itself during preparation for elections, election periods and at successions. Nigerians are manipulated with a view to rigging elections, while electoral officials are tele-guided in the discharge of their official duties (Omotoso, 2006:336).

Electoral corruption is widespread in our country and is witnessed by more people than the other kinds of corruption. The effect is that it makes society corruption friendly. It makes a mockery of the fight against corruption because the citizens see the campaign against corruption as more of fulfilling all righteousness. It becomes more difficult for leaders to fight corruption because each is carrying the moral burden of corrupt victory (The Nigeria Voice, September 30, 2016). Even the incumbent president Muhammadu Buhari who came to power with avow mantra of fighting corruption could not do much because he is surrounded by corrupt elements. Conscious efforts are not in the pipeline to do holistic electoral reform that can eliminate corruption in the system simply because every ruling party benefits from the rot in the electoral system.

6.0 VOTE BUYING

Vote buying is a concept that is gradually becoming a phenomenon in the political/ electoral lexicon of Nigeria democracy. In the past, the system of influencing prospective voters with money or other materials is not uncommon as some voters are given money, food items or party souvenirs by different political parties to influence their decision on election day. However, the new trend in vogue now is actual commercialization and trading of votes like commodity popularly known as see and buy (dibo Kosebe). The concept in active connivance with election officials and security agencies were practiced during gubernatorial elections in Edo 20---, Ondo 20---, and Ekiti State 2018. (Omilusi, 2017) argued that vote buying is done by political parties through their special agents, have devised a new method of financially compensating voters at the polling booths after authentication of the correct vote, in some instances, with the active connivance of election officials.

Vote Buying is a political and social-cultural phenomenon and it cut across different regions and views differently by scholars. Schaffer, 2002 view vote buying from the standpoint of economic exchange when he argues that;

A vote is literally bought or sold depending on whether one adopt the perspective of the candidate or the voter. The act of vote buying by this view is a contract, or perhaps an auction in which the voter sells his or her vote to the highest bidder (Schaffer, 2002).

However, the practice is criminal and antithetical to good governance which has retarded the development of many African democracies. But what can vulnerable voters do in the face of object poverty and past failure of the political class to fulfill their campaign promises.

There are different forms of vote buying, apart from those specified in the 2006 Electoral Act. Among them are:

- direct inducement of the electorate with money to influence votes in favour of a particular political party or candidate in Edo, Ondo and Ekiti states elections
- inducement of local political elites with money or materials in order to gain the block vote of a particular constituency;
- providing wards or electoral constituencies with materials such as clothing or food with the intention of getting their votes;
- purchasing cars or motorbikes, building houses and providing contracts for traditional rulers and local elites in order to get the votes of their subjects;
- paying political thugs to intimidate and harass the electorate to force them to vote for a particular political party or candidate;
- paying political thugs to snatch ballot boxes;
- paying security agents to aid in electoral fraud;
- paying electoral officials to aid in electoral fraud (Damjibo & Oladeji, 2008).

7.0 INEC IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was established in 1998 by General Absusalam Abubakar following the dissolution of NECON after the death of General Sani Abacha and Hon. Justice Ephraim Akpata was appointed as the first chairman. INEC conducted the 1999 general elections and ushered in the fourth republic (Musa, 2001; Okoye, 2007). Dr. Abel Guobadia took over as chairman of INEC in 2000 after the death of Justice Akpata on completion of his tenure in 2005, Prof. Maurice Ewu was appointed as chairman for a five-year tenure which ended in 2010. Prof. Attahiru Jega was appointed in 2010 for five-year tenure (Ekundayo, 2015) and completed the tenure in 2015 paving way for the current chairman Prof. Mahmood Yakubu who was appointed on October 21, 2015, for a five-year tenure.

The commission is concerned principally with the organization and conduct of elections which Prof. Jega described to have continued to be poorly organized, conflict-ridden with restricted or obstructed participation and very unfair outcomes (Jega, 2010). The independent

and non-partisan electoral institution is of the greatest importance to the whole electoral process being the body that is conducting the elections. This is due to the fact that the quality and credibility of elections are directly related to the competency of the organizing institution (Edigheji, 2006; Yaqub, 2000). In the performance of its constitutionally assigned duties, the commission must be truly independent, transparent and impartial. It must also be perceived in reality by all actors in the electoral process to be neutral, objective and above board (Luqman, 2009). If the commission is to perform creditably, the composition of the board must be made up of men and women of integrity and proven track records of performance in previous assignments.

However, the commission in Nigeria could not be said to be above board in the discharge of its duties due to alleged corruption, connivance with ruling party and display of incompetence by the body in some of the elections conducted in the past. In this respect Ekundayo argued that:

A flash back at the political history of Nigeria since independence will glaringly reveal that past efforts at democratization collapsed due to failure of electoral bodies known as electoral commissions to conduct credible elections. The problem faced by past commissions continues to recur and based present electoral management body while past shortcomings continue to manifest (Ekundayo, 2015:51).

8.0 THE COMPOSITION OF THE COMMISSION

The Third Schedule Part 1 "F" 141 a-b, 2a-b, 3 of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria stated the composition of the INEC as follows.

- (a) a chairman, who shall be the Chief Electoral Commissioner
- (b) twelve other members to be known as National Electoral Commissioners;
- (2) A member of the commission shall (a) be non-partisan and a person of unquestionable integrity (b) be not less than 40 years of age in the case of the Chairman and not less than 35 years of age in the case of the National Commissioners.
- (3) There shall be for each state of the federation and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, a Resident Electoral Commissioner (FRN, 1999).

The commission's statutory functions according to the 1999 constitution are as follows:

1. to organize, undertake and supervise all elections to the offices of the State Assemblies;
2. register Political Parties in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution and an Act of National Assembly;
3. monitor the organization and operation of the Political Parties including their finances;
4. arrange and conduct the registration of persons qualified to vote and prepare, maintain and revise the register of voters for the purpose of any election;

5. monitor political campaigns and provide rules and regulations which shall govern the political parties;
6. ensure that all Electoral Commissioners, Electoral and Returning Officers take and subscribe to the oath of Office prescribed by law;
7. carryout any such other functions as may be conferred upon it by an Act of the National Assembly. (Okoh, 2005; Okoye, 2007).

9.0 THE CHALLENGES CONFRONTING THE COMMISSION.

There are numerous challenges confronting the commission in its bid to perform its constitutional functions and deliver credible elections to the nation. Some of which are:

Insecurity in electoral constituencies that affects staff (permanent and Ad-hoc)

- b. Inadequate funding;
- c. attitude of the political class and interference of the ruling party in its activities
- d. apathetic and inactive citizenry;
- e. delay in the amendments to the legal framework such as constitution and the electoral laws;
- f. inability to prosecute electoral offenders;
- g. completion of the review of electoral constituencies,
- h. compromises of electoral officers leading to manipulation of results and declaring wrong candidate as winners of elections;
- i. desperation of candidates and political parties leading to rigging, ballot snatching and other electoral vices;
- j. logistics challenges like transportation to convey election materials to centres at appropriate time especially in rogged and riverine communities (Jega, 2014 and Abubakar, 2012).

10.0 CORRUPTION IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

The issue of corruption in Nigeria has assumed a life of its own, cutting across different dimensions. It occurs at all levels of society, from local, state to the national government, civil societies, judiciary, military and other services, small and large scale businesses, etc. This section will focus on security agencies, INEC officials, the ruling party and politicians, the media, electorates and electoral corruption in Nigeria. Corruption is the dishonest or fraudulent conduct by those in power, typically involving bribery. It is the illegitimate use of power to benefit a private interest (Morris, 1991). Corruption is the giving of a bribe to an official so that the truth will not be told. It involves the embezzlement of public fund for personal use and any act which is considered to be a criminal act according to the law of a particular society.

11.0 SECURITY AGENCIES AND ELECTORAL CORRUPTION

The roles of security in election management could not be overemphasized. They help to preserve the integrity of the electoral process, secure lives of the electorates and the electoral materials deploy by election management body. The actions and inactions of the security

agencies on election duties will either make or mar the process. Most of the electoral violence in Nigeria is perpetrated under the watchful eyes of security forces. It is a common occurrence to see security personnel look the other way when irregularities occurred during electoral process. It may either be that they are supporting the ruling party or they have been compromised with financial inducement. Such activities undermine security and can worsen the reactions of electorates who watched helplessly when their votes are manipulated without any help coming from the security operatives. According to Alemika, there were reported cases of widespread violence and intimidation at polling stations in different part of the country during the 2003 elections where the political office holders used their orderlies to intimidate voters, disorganized voting process and snatched electoral materials (Alemika, 2007:158). Mostly, political parties and notable politicians arrange a settlement for the leadership of security agencies involved in election duties. Based on this, the security operatives will be present at polling stations when violence, rigging ballot snatching, and stuffing is taking place without effecting any arrest.

In the rerun election conducted in December 2016 in River State, reports from observer groups, police public relation officer Mr. Awunah confirmed the culpability of military and police in the fraud and crises and confirmed the arrest of some officers who he said were suspected of being compromised by politicians (Adebayo, 2016) also, Governor Nyesom Wike alleged that Inspector General of Police (IGP) and police operatives unleashed Mayhem, snatch results, kill and maim Rivers people, while doing the bidding of the ruling party. He, therefore, charged his people to "wake up and protect their mandate from political robbers, masquerading as police and INEC officials" (Nwakaudu, 2017). All these cases are pure compromises from the institution that suppose to uphold the sanctity of ballots and integrity of the electoral system and therefore could be regarded as electoral corruption.

12.0 INEC STAFF AND ELECTORAL CORRUPTION

Some of the reasons why elections in Nigeria are not credible, free and fair is the fact that many of the staff both permanent and ad-hoc of the electoral body are not above board in the discharge of their duties. Many of them do compromise their duty after receiving bribes and inducement from politicians to rig elections. This is done in active connivance with security operatives. This was alluded to when Alemika stated that "security agencies, INEC officials were muzzled financially to condone, thumbprint and stuff ballot boxes in the 2003 elections" (Alemika 2011). The report of the investigation carried out on the irregularities during December 2016 re-run election in River State revealed that "out of the alleged N360 million bribe, N111 million and N300,000.00 were recovered from electoral officials. Each electoral officer got N15m, while the three senior electoral officers for the senatorial zones received an extra N5m each which brought the total to N360m (Omonobi, Iheanachor, and Ajayi, 2017). If this could happen in a re-run senatorial election in a state, one could imagine what transpires in general elections. INEC in connivance with the government and influential members sited polling units in residential houses of powerful party members. The sanctity and security of ballot papers became suspicious as it was reported to people having access to the ballot papers and boxes prior to the election period. Such individuals as late Chief Adedibu of Oyo Politics was an example and were left scourge free (Salahu, 2015). This and many others are corrupt practices going on in INEC unchecked.

13.0 THE POLITICAL PARTIES/POLITICIANS AND ELECTORAL CORRUPTION

Political parties are a more or less organized group of individual supporting a political program and its leaders who aspire to become a public officer. The 1999 constitution described the political party as an association of persons whose activities includes canvassing for votes in support of a candidate for election to the office (FRN, 1999). Suffice to say therefore that political parties have the responsibility of recruiting competent individuals for political leadership through periodic elections, education of the masses, dissemination of information and articulation of the interest of the people (Salahu, 2015). The Nigeria political parties lack ideology and basic impetus for development. Political associations in Nigeria are propelled by personal aggrandizement using the vehicle of regionalism and ethnicity. Parties' philosophy, ideology, and activities are centered on the founders and few money bags that financed the activities of such political parties.

Though, the constitution provided for the funding of the political parties from the federation accounts which even if given, fall short of running electioneering process in Nigeria. This made political parties to source for the fund from members and private organizations through fundraising, registration of party members and even purchase of eligibility form to contest for the position in the party (Salahu and Ali, 2008). The nomination fee for candidates aspiring for elective positions is too much and only the corrupt elements or those with godfathers could afford such amount. This unrestrained funding means increases in the political corruption in the electoral system as only the rich and the political entrepreneurs can contest elections (Adetula, 2009).

The Nigerian political parties today are operating outside the know established laws on party financing as spelled out in the 1999 constitution section 225, 226 and 278 (FRN, 1999) and the electoral laws. Simply because of the monetized nature of Nigeria politics, political parties have become a center or pool of corrupt people who donate heavily to finance party activities like campaign, rallies and deploy heavy cash to influence voters on elections day. The elective conventions and party primaries also witness this same sharing of corruption proceed by different gladiators who attempt to outwit the other to become party executive or a flag bearer of the party in an election. Even the current ruling party, the All Progressive Congress (APC) have been severally alleged to harbor corrupt politicians despite its avowed fight against corruption because the said individuals allegedly bankrolled its election through the procedure of corrupt practices and so the circle of corruption continues with its impacts on good governance and development of the country. Political parties, therefore, become a platform of the perpetuation of corruption in the electoral system using ethnic diversity, regionalism, religion, poverty, unemployment and other economic challenges confronting the country. Politics now become a profession and winning election into any political offices at every level of government in the country now become a matter of life and death because every individual or political party are now fighting for their own pocket.

14.0 THE MEDIA AND ELECTORAL CORRUPTION

The media refers to various means of communications. For example, the print, radio, television and the social media i.e facebook, WhatsApp, twitter, etc. The media is a fundamental institution for disseminating information from one end to the other for the purpose of, among others enlightening the community (Norman, 2010:320). The media shapes the opinion of the people and how they perceive the world and what they consider to be important (Ibid). Often referred to as the fourth estate of the realm, the media performs a

number of important functions in the electoral process. Norman identifies some of the functions as follows:

The media report the news, serves as an intermediary between the government and the people, helps determine which issues should be discussed, and keeps people actively involved in society and politics. Every citizen has the rights to be kept informed at all times of various events in the country, and in the world at large which are of importance to the lives and activities of the people and also issues of importance to society. The power of the news media is tremendous and its potential awesome. It is capable of informing, misinforming and even misleading the public (Norma, 2010:321).

As important as the roles of the media to democracy may seem, the negative aspect of their activities is actually not helpful to Nigeria democracy. The sensational reportage of events in order to cash the fancy of the readers and the ethnic and religious coloration in reporting political events are some of the negative impacts of the media. It is important to note that the expectation of the media with regard to their contribution to development lies in their ability to put the government of the day under close monitoring. This is made manifest in the media's watchdog's role in examining the conduct of public servants, especially the politicians, which is a task that is germane to democracy. On why media failed to expose electoral corruption Sarauf argued that:

As long as the media continue to embrace commercialism to the detriment of public interest, the incidence of corruption, with a concomitant poverty of the citizens, would continue unabated. Public interest in this case was operationalized in the majoritarian perspective or commonly-held value (Sorauf, 1957: 619).

The media performance or responsibility has a relationship with the level of corruption. In other words, corruption in a polity is not simply a result of leadership incompetence or corrupt practices, but significantly the inability or refusal of the country's mainstream media to hold the leadership accountable in order to prevent or alleviate corruption (Omojola, 2010). Omojola, therefore, concludes that:

Media commercialism does not only hinder journalism practice, it also undermines its integrity. The valid but immoral claim of a typical news organization to break even and make profit on the platform of commercialism has invoked the fortitude of celebrating the sources of advertising incomes. The corporate spirit has found its way into the heart of the typical Nigerian journalist who seems to have caved in to corruption tendencies. The situation is compounded by the fact that many journalists in this country are poorly paid, thereby resulting in this vice of corruption that is demonstrated in the form of bribery and other types of indirectly solicited gifts. (Omojola, 2010:34).

The media are directly and indirectly contributed to electoral corruption through the neglect of their core functions of being a watchdog on the activities of government as the fourth estate of the realm. Many of the news items and bulletin are twisted to favor a political figure, a ruling

party especially newspapers that our own and founded by politicians and state own radio and television stations who operates at the whim and caprice of the chief executive of such state. They have a way of manipulating the news items to favor their principals. They misinform the general public to make wrong electoral decisions with consequences on governance this could be regarded as electoral corruption.

15.0 THE ELECTORATE AND ELECTORAL CORRUPTION

Many Nigerian voters are so vulnerable because of ignorance, greed, and poverty to the extent of commodifying and commercializing their votes. People sell off their rights (votes) for Kongos of rice, recharge cards and money as low as between N200 – N5,000 depending on the environment and the caliber of people involved. This commercialization of votes popularly refers to as vote buying has become an eyesore to our democracy. Vote buying occurs at different levels, starting from party congresses, convention, party primary elections where delegates are bought over to swing the results in favor of the money bags. At general elections, North to South the practice has become a common phenomenon more recent examples are the governorship elections in Ekiti, Osun, Edo, Ondo and Anambra States where politicians and party agents offer various sums of money to electorates in exchange for their votes. Various concepts such as vote and cook soup (Dibo Kosebe) “see and buy” were used as a slogan. Some will vote, capture the ballot paper with a camera phone as evidence to claim his/her money. In view of this, Danjibo and Oladeji submitted that:

In states where vote buying actually took place party agent in a particularly close-run ward were reported to have handed out N200 notes to voters in the queue. In some states party agents also gave out voter cards to their supporters. In other states underage people were paid to vote. A highly disturbing case was the report that compromised INEC officials were used to distribute double the number of ballots to supporters of incumbents. In states where this scenario occurred many INEC officials reportedly turned their jobs into a business opportunity whereby parties bought books of ballot papers for a market fixed price (Danjibo and Oladeji, 2008:184).

The November 18, 2017 governorship election in Anambra witnessed same ugly situation. The Independent Service Delivery Group (ISDG) in its reports on the election stated that: “Reports from our observers in the field on the widespread open selling of votes by citizens cast a major slur on the integrity of the votes. The trend of vote buying which has become a major feature of recent elections sadly repeated itself in Anambra” (Amadi, 2017). Inducements are as old as elections in Nigeria. Sadly, rather than outgrowing it, the Anambra poll signposted the fact that it appears to be getting worse. This does not augur well for our democracy. Off course this act of corruption of the electoral system portends grave danger for good governance and development of democracy in the country. It was also a sad annotation to the willingness of the electorate to mortgage their future to filthy lucre. Voters who sell their votes do not have any moral right to expect good stewardship from those who purchase their mandates. Even more lamentable was the fact that the buying and selling of votes took place in the full glare of security men and election officials (Okogba, 2017).

This act of corruption is done in flagrant disregard to the provision of the laws of the country. Section 131 (1&2) of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria specified forms of vote buying as electoral offenses under the sub-title 'Bribery and Conspiracy', which are treated as offenses.

- (1) A person who:
 - (a) direct or indirect by himself or by any other person on his behalf, gives, lends or agrees to give or lend, or offers, promises:
 - (b) promises to procure or endeavour to procure, any money or valuable consideration to or for any voter, to or for any person on behalf of any voter, or to or for any other person, in order to induce any voter to vote, to refrain from voting, or corruptly does any such act on account of such voter having voted or refrained from voting, at any election;
 - (c) directly or indirectly, by himself or any other person on his behalf, corruptly makes any gift, loan, offer, promise, procurement, or agreement to or for any person, in order to induce such person to procure or to endeavour to procure the return of any person as a member of a Legislative House or to an elective office or the vote of any voter at any election upon or in consequence of any gift, loan, offer, promise, procurement or agreement, corruptly procure, or engages or promises or endeavours to procure, the return of a person as a member of a legislative house or an elective office or the vote of any voter at any election:
 - (d) advances or pays or causes to be paid any money to or for the use of any other person, with the intent that such money or any part thereof shall be expended in bribery at any election, or who knowingly pays or causes to be paid any money to any person in discharge or repayment of any money wholly or in part expended in bribery at any election,
 - (e) after any election directly, or indirectly, by himself or by any other person on his behalf receives any money or valuable consideration on account of any person having voted or refrained from voting, or having induced any other person to vote or refrain from voting or having induced any candidate to refrain from canvassing for votes for himself at any such election (FRN, 1999).

As provided above, the law is clear, the action of commercialization of votes is illegal but unfortunately, the security agencies who are the implementers of the law are also culprits which make the law ineffective.

16.0 AGENTS OF SOCIALIZATION AND ELECTORAL CORRUPTION:

Interest groups such as the national union of road transport workers (NURTW) youths and women groups, religious leaders, traditional rulers, organized labour violent thugs are active participants in this act of electoral corruption. The groups act as fronts and intermediaries between their groups and political parties and politicians. They receive money to mobilize their groups to support a candidate political party for the election.

17.0 THE CAUSES OF ELECTORAL CORRUPTION

The vulnerability of electoral processes in Nigeria has encouraged various malpractice regarded as electoral corruption and are caused by a number of factors. Aikhionbare, 2015 identified some of the causes to include:

17.1 Poverty corruption has been the bane of the country for ages inhibiting the growth and progress of the nation. The deplorable state and standard of living the people have served to further increase the level of poverty and corruption. Those in the political class have taken advantage of the desperate Nigerians living in the sorry state by offering them a meager amount of money or making promises which they have no plans of fulfilling. This seems good and true to the poor masses hence they trade their votes.

17.2 Unemployment and Poor economy: Another significant cause of electoral corruption is the level of economic instability in the country. This acts as a huge motivation for people to seek political office in order for them to feather their own nests with a share of our commonwealth. This further drives the "do or die" attitude which makes desperate politicians resort to electoral malpractices.

17.3 Staffing: Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) normally engages temporary staff during election periods. Although the engagement of temporary staff makes economic sense as explained by the immediate past INEC chairman, Professor Attahiru Jega, the problem with temporary staff is that they are more easily influenced into electoral malpractices and are sometimes not available during the process because they have little or nothing to lose.

17.4 Weak Judicial System: The performance of the judiciary has so far been under par with respect to cases of electoral fraud which are sometimes swept under the carpet or controversially decided. This is quite disappointing because this institution is saddled with the responsibility of ensuring justice, equity and fairness even to the poorest of the poor and it is most disheartening that on issues concerning election and electoral irregularity, it seems to have been folding its arms either due to an overload of petitions or inadequate training of judicial officers or the corruption within the judicial system itself.

17.5 Indiscipline and Decadence amongst Security Operatives: There have been some instances of acts of indiscipline and decadence amongst our security operatives during elections. There have also been reports of security operatives assigned on election duty who have been used by politicians to perpetuate electoral fraud (Alkhlonbare, 2015).

18.0 OTHER CAUSES INCLUDE:

18.1 Greed: Greed has caused a lot of crises in the world, including Nigeria. It is because of greed that political leaders embezzle from the funds they are supposed to use for national development for their own selfish needs thereby contributing to national problems.

Weak implementation of laws on electoral offenders: Both the nation's 1999 constitution section 131 (1&2) and electoral Acts 2006 as amended section 95 (1-8) and 96 (1), (2a & b) specified the prohibition of certain conduct in the electoral process. Many Nigerians including security operatives flagrantly disobey these laws without severe consequences thereby encouraging others to do same. This has promoted impunity and electoral corruption in the body polity.

18.2 Inadequate Political Education: The electorates are not sufficiently educated about their rights and obligations in electoral and governance process and thereby deceived in making a wrong electoral decision by the politicians. If a voter is properly educated about the danger inherent in selling his mandate/ vote, he/she may rescind the decision and the society will be better for it.

19.0 THE IMPLICATIONS OF ELECTORAL CORRUPTION ON NIGERIA DEMOCRACY

The elected representatives may choose not to care about the welfare of the electorates because of commercialization of the electoral system. For instance, a governorship aspirant who paid heavily to secure a ticket at the primary election bought his way through during elections may neglect the welfare of the people and concentrates on looting the commonwealth to recover and make a profit on his strategic investment.

The electoral impurities can lead to curious alienation as is constantly witnessed in the polity in Nigeria that should be a source of inspiration to Africa and indeed the black people of the world.

The fraudulent subversion of the electoral process has made it difficult for the conduct of participatory, competitive and acceptable free and fair elections in Nigeria. The alarming rate of sharp practices in the elections has made nonsense of people votes. As peoples wish from the votes are not guaranteed, voters turn out from 1999 to continue to decline due to a decline in public confidence in the electoral system to produce credible leadership. The institution of an illegal regime through ballot theft can be linked to bad governance and mismanagement of state resources. The instituted government leadership along with their patrons and influential individuals loot the government treasury and care less for the masses (Salahu, 2015 and Guardian Editorial 2016).

Wastages of scarce resources: Due to various irregularities occasioned by electoral corruption, many elections have been canceled in Nigeria either by INEC during the process or by electoral tribunals and regular courts which will necessitate re-run. These wasted resources could have been channeled to develop infrastructure.

20.0 CONCLUSION

Electoral corruption is a vice that is deeply rooted in Nigeria electoral system. It rears its ugly head at every election from the first republic till dates. The survival of democracy depends on the periodic conduct of acceptable and competitive free and fair elections conducted by properly constituted and incorruptible electoral management body. But as shown in the paper, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Nigeria is faced with many institutional and human challenges including but not limited to corrupt practices which continue to hinder the performance of the organization at delivering credible elections. The paper discussed the electoral corruption perpetrated by various stakeholders in the electoral system such as security agencies, INEC staff, ruling party/politicians, the media and the electorates. The causes were identified as well as the implications for sustainable democracy. The paper argued that since the electoral commission is a subsystem of the whole system in Nigeria, the endemic corruption in every facet of the Nigeria system becomes a major

challenge to the credibility of the commission and undermines its integrity and service delivery functions. Despite the challenges identified in the conduct of elections due to electoral corruption, hope is still on the horizon in getting it right in the future. However, the following are suggested to reduce corrupt practices towards credible elections in Nigeria.

Poverty must be tackled in Nigeria if the fight against corruption must succeed. There are many poor people in Nigeria and poverty pushes them into the corruption of all kinds including selling their mandate during elections, and taking a bribe to manipulate electoral process as well as youths working as thugs for politicians. Efforts must be geared towards reducing the level of poverty in the country to sanitize the electoral system.

- The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should look critically at the activities of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) relating to elections with a view to sanitizing them.
- The composition of the electoral management body and its funding should not be tied to the apron of the executive who may have tendency to manipulate the commission and its activities.
- There must be concerted effort at de-commercialisation of electoral process to prevent vote buying, reduces salaries and allowances of political officeholders, and the do-or-die nature of Nigerian politics to reduce electoral malpractices.
- Operational guidelines, rules and regulations for political parties in all their activities should be clearly spelt out to increase internal democracy and enforcement by INEC and the security agencies should be total without fear or favour.
- The citizens should step up advocacy for open electoral system in which INEC purge itself of the bad eggs for credible performance.
- Implementation of strict penalties: Those caught perpetuating electoral fraud must be given strict punishment that is commensurable with the offence committed to serve as deterrent to would be offenders no matter highly place. The security and judiciary would need to wake up to this responsibility.

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