

## **Political Crisis and Electoral Malpractices in a Growing Nigeria Democracy**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*In human society, politics is seen as every day game, individuals or group struggle to dominate over the activities of life. This is why the great Greek philosopher Aristotle saw man as a political animal. This has come to justify that politics started from time immemorial but the method of playing it (politics) among or between individuals and nations varied. In the course of acquisition of power, violence of all kinds seems to occur especially during elections. In the electoral process of a developed country democracy is always generally competitive. There is necessity to define the concepts of our key studies which includes: Electoral malpractices; this is one of the political immoral vices, which always occur in Nigeria politics, these include rigging of election and snatching of ballot boxes. Political crisis is the problems that always occur while conducting elections and this is as a result of electoral malpractices. Growing democracy refers to those states or nations which gained independence after the second world-war.*

**Key words:** Democracy, Election and political violence.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Democratic governance appears to be in crisis if not in danger, as a result of many factors which may occur as a result of insecurity in the state, god-fatherism and political instability of a state trying to adopt or practice democracy as a result of their independence [1]. Democratic governance also appears to be full of manipulations that corrupts our political system in the country (Nigeria) and this could exist in form of thugry, snatching of ballot boxes etc [2]. All the beautiful attributes of what the electoral process should mean cannot be associated with Nigeria. Nigeria electoral history has not been a pleasant one. Nigeria has participated in many elections beginning with the colonial era when the concept of elections was first introduced. Elective positions have also increased tremendously and electoral referees have also changed from being members of the colonial service whose electoral duties were part time assignments to being members of an independent electoral commission on full time employment, since its attainment of independence in 1960, Nigeria has been bedevilled by political instability fueled largely by an electoral process in crisis and electoral malpractice also. The country and her leaders have refused to learn from history and avoid the pitfalls of the past mistakes in order to pave the pathway for a secured political future rather, they have continued to perpetuate the worst forms of political processes characterized by ugly incidents of political thugry and violence, electoral malpractices both at party level and general elections,

unending law suits, crisis of legitimacy, instability and chaos.

Over the period of Nigeria's existence as independent state, all these negative attributes of her political processes have often compelled military adventurous to seize power with their civilian collaborators, without any fear of contradiction, the problems associated with the first post independence national election of 1964 and 1965 western region election culminated in January 15, 1966 coup [3].

The reason for this is characterized by wide spread rigging, intimidation and chaos that some of the major political parties decided to boycott the election, creating in its after math serious constitutional dilemma, the latter election of the western region was also marred by the problem of massive rigging and other irregularities this wide spread violence giving impetus for the military coup in Nigeria and the culture of instability that beset the country for over three decades. Other elections that have taken place in Nigeria after the 1964 and 1965 elections have not fared better. The 1979 elections that saw the emergence of Mallam Shehu Shagari as a civilian president was monitored by the international observers and were said to be massively rigged. The 1983 election was even the worse marred by corruption, political violence and polling irregularities; it provided the military men another impetus to seize power on December 31, 1983. They cited electoral malpractices as one of their reasons for overthrowing the civilian government.

The 1999, 2003 and 2007 elections, three elections conducted during this period of eight years of Nigerian's democracy have been lampooned by many critics as far from free and fair. Infact, the general election of April 2007, conducted by the existing current electoral body, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was described as the worst election ever held in Nigeria as a result of indescribable irregularities which marred the election perhaps the freest and fairest election in the history of Nigeria was the June 12th, 1993 election that was annulled by general Ibrahim Babangida erstwhile self styled military president of Nigeria. Unfortunately, the country was deprived of the opportunity of taking advantage of these successful achievements to launch itself on the road to true democracy by greedy and rabid political and military class interested in perpetuating itself in power [4].

The vital lesson though from this experience is that a sound electoral process is dependent on having a solid democratic infrastructure in place and vice versa.

The problem facing Nigeria emanated from many fronts, which includes: irrational behaviors (actions) of the political elites, politics of division and politics that are devoid of ideology. Other factors are corruption and poverty, lack of distributive justice, regional and religious differences. All these combined to electoral crisis (riots and conflicts) in the polity culminating in a public desperation and insecurity, politics of assassination, decampments (carpet crossing), money bags and public protests. All reached climax during the 2003 elections when the nation thinks it is shifting away from these forces. They would somersault and clash again creating another political thunderstorm. It looks like the society would hardly outgrow the politics of extremism because the political class is always going beyond the limits of what are reasonable to secure or retain political power. During the 2003 elections money bags (instead of political ideology) directed political actions in political parties and also it influenced the

activities of many politicians.

As a result of that, the presidential candidates of the two major political parties (PDP and ANPP) got their party tickets by stuffing the boots of their party delegates with Ghana must go bags. This frustrated and intimidated their political opponents within (and those in the other minor political parties). As already mentioned, after the 2003 party primaries the politics of Ghana-must go bags took the center stage and every other thing went to the highest bidder [5]. The nation was shocked by the donations made to the Peoples Democratic Party re-election of Obasanjo and Atiku. For example, Aliko Dangote and Emeka Offor donated N1 billion to Obasanjo-Atiku re-election bid and some companies contributed N40 million. To appreciate the magnitude and influence of corruption in the 2003 electoral process, this was a tip of appreciated efforts of political manipulation (corruption). The fund raising party served in the opinion as a conducive environment for corrupt government officials to channel their loots to the party in the name of political contributions. But, the praise singers and political machineries of the presidency rushed out to tell the world that the governors and public servants made contributions out of their private funds. However, the questions are, since the governors could afford to donate millions of naira to their party (the PDP), why are the roads in their states not maintained? their streets littered with trash? one cannot ask enough questions here; why are state Hospitals, Clinics and Universities in the state unequipped ? are civil servants permitted by the constitution to contribute to political affairs? If the answer is affirmative, how much are individuals and businesses permitted to donate to political party?.

No wonder why corruptions are in our electoral practices and violence as well is self perpetuated in the society, Nigeria is a place where politicians can threaten lives, kill, steal and turn the constitution upside down to remain in power. It is no longer news that political parties and politicians in the society represent nothing other than bribery and corruption [6]. However, lack of political principle makes the politicians to shift like and quickly abandon their political parties whenever they fail to achieve their selfish political ambition in the parties and elections in Nigeria. And the failure of the political parties to control their members made the situation worse. With monetary inducements, political thugs working for political parties get involved in political assassinations, thereby exacerbating the insecurity issues in the society.

Evolution of Political Crisis in Nigeria: Since the origin of politics, it has being surrounded with violence, crisis and lot of political vices. Recent events in Nigeria may compel many political analyst interested in African politics to wonder what has gone wrong with the self proclaimed “giant of Africa”, but for those who have been following the development in the country since independence this would not be a big surprise [7]. If there was any element of surprise at all, it would probably be the speed at which things have allowed to deteriorate.

Going back history lane, Nigeria has its own share of political upheaval. The first republic did not last long. Soon after independence due to lack of tolerance among politicians and their willingness to abide by the rules of law and fair play in governance, political instability engulfed the country. This led to the fall of the first republic and its governance headed by the then head of state, Nnamdi Azikiwe and Prime Minister Tafawa Belewa and herald in the first military regime in Nigeria, headed by General Aguiyi Ironsi and some other notable southern officers. This was followed by the government of Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon and although improper as it was, the long reign of the Gowon’s regime provided the country with a period of political stability, but not without initial political upheaval characterized by the bitter civil war that engulfed the nation, when Colonel Ojukwu tried to calve out Biafra out of the

former eastern region of Nigeria [8]. This long period of political stability together with the oil boom of the 70's might have tempted early economist and political printer to foresee a brighter future for the country.

This evolution of political crisis is vast because of its wide spread to different political parties and in some region of this country like Kano. There are crises and riots that occurred in 1953, when Chief Anthony Enahoro moved the motion for self government in 1959, the council of the ministers decided to remain neutral over the issue. The Action group ministers unilaterally decided to support what is in their own opinion was an important motion being sponsored by their party. They decided to resign/vacate their seats in order to vote in favour of the motion.

The North was not in support of the motion for self government and the Sadaurna of Sokoto, backed by the Northern elements, decided to put up a counter motion thereby creating a rift between the North and the South; as the crisis over the motion for self-governance deepened between the North and the South. The North became separatist in sentiments and openly expressed that the amalgamation of North and the South in 1914, was a regrettable mistake in the political/history of Nigeria [9].

The Northerners were especially wounded by the insults their representative received from Lagos mob following their attitudes to Enahoro's question of self-government for Nigeria. When the Northerners were still nursing the anger against the Southerners, the untimely campaign in the North in May, by S.L Akintola led to the Kano riot in which many Southerners were killed and their properties looted and destroyed. After the riot tribal hatred among Nigeria gradually developed [10]. The crisis in Nigeria was elevated to the next level on the general elections of (1979 and 1983) when five political parties contested the 1979 general elections in Nigeria. These parties were NPN, UPN, NPP, GNPP AND PRP. The climax of the 1979 general election was the presidential election. At the end of the election, on August 16, 1979, Alhaji Shehu Shagari was declared elected president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The declaration was made by the Chief Returning Officers Mallam Abubakar and the Assistant returning Officer MFJ Okoro. The President-elect Shehu Shagari who contested on the plat form of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) polled, 5, 688,857 votes to beat his opponents.

The NPP rejected FEDECO's declaration of Alhaji Shagari as the president-elect of Nigeria. In a strongly worded statement issued at an extra-ordinary meeting of its executive committee in Nsukka, the party described FEDECO's verdict on the election as Fraud [10].

The Peoples Redemption Party (PRP) described as outrageous the declaration of Alhaji Shehu Shagari as the executive president of Nigeria by FEDECO. The party wondered how 2/3 of 19 states is 2/3 of 12 after the NPN legal adviser Chief Richard Akinjide had raised a legal dust on the issues.

Then other four political parties rejected the FEDECO declaration of Alhaji Shehu Shagari as the President -elect, on the ground that he did not win 2/3 of the 19 states as stipulated in the constitution and they interpreted it to mean 2/3 of 13 states of the federation. Meanwhile, Shehu Shagari, the president-elect, won 2/3 of 12 states of federation which FEDECO interpreted to mean 2/3 of 19 states as stipulated in the constitution. The case was taken to election Petition Tribunal and Supreme Court of Nigeria by the leader of the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) Chief Obafemi Awolowo. The case was decided in favour of the President-elect Alhaji Shehu Shagari, both by the Electoral tribunal and the Supreme Court of Nigeria [11].

Eastern Region Crisis of 1953: The eastern region was one of Nigeria federal division, dating back originally from the division of the colony; southern Nigeria in 1954, its capital Enugu was the region capital. It is officially divided in 1967 into three new states: East-central state, Rivers state and South eastern state. The east central state had its capital at Enugu, which is now part of Enugu State.

In 1953, the old eastern region had a major crisis due to the expulsion of Professor Eyo Ita from Calabar. He was one of the pioneer nationalist for Nigeria Independence. He is an Efik man, the minority in the region, the Ibibio, Annang, Efik, Ijaw and Ogoja demanded state of their own, the Calabar Ogoja-River State (ORS)

The struggle for the creation of (ORS) continued and was a major issue on the state of minority of Nigeria during debate in Europe for Nigeria independence.

The extent of this crisis went as far as joining of Nigeria and Cameroun during the July 1953 London constitutional conference, citing fear of Nigeria domination, Cameroun requested the unconditional withdrawal of the Southern Cameroun from the eastern region of Nigeria and its transformation into a separate region of Nigeria and its own in line with its trusteeship status. Britain agreed and implemented separation in 1954, making the southern Cameroun (including Bakassi Peninsula) a semi autonomous quasi-region of the Nigeria Federation with its own house of assembly and executive bodies.

The Political Crisis of 1962-1964: Nigeria transmitted into an independent nation in first October 1960, with a number of unresolved issues [12]. Added to these earlier problems were created by those to whom the rein of power had been lack of trust among the various tribe groups that made up and jostled for political and economic power of the federation between 1960 and 1966 those latent divisive elements within Nigeria politics came to the fore front and this period witnessed political conflagration that engulfed Nigeria in the immediate post independence era resolved round the question of ethnic minorities, internal conflicts in the western region which resulted in the breakup of the action group party. The census manipulated controversy of 1962-1964 and the electoral malpractices in the western and federal elections.

Political Crisis of Current Dispensation: This implies current political immoral vices taking place in Nigeria. It is obvious to observe from our every day news that the world lament about the crises in the northern part of Nigeria, if it is not in Kano, Kaduna, Bornu or Adamawa state and the list goes on. The tendency is to blame the military insurgence of boko haram that is devoted to establishing an Islamic state. The Nigerian government has become grossly impotent in dealing with crisis.

The military and occasionally the police have engaged in gun battles with armed men that are supposedly members of the boko haram sect. yet, these efforts have not deterred the group civilian's most of the time become victims of this exchange of gunfire.

There have been increasing clashes in the northern communities such as Dogo, Dowa and Kaduna state where about 20 people were recently killed indiscriminately by attackers shooting and stabbing anyone on the site without caring to know their religious beliefs. There problems beg for a more systemic solution which the federal government has demonstrated that it grossly lacks. The crisis in the north and in places like Dogo and Dawa may also be an indicative of the crisis in the rest of the country that are slowly brewing to the point that if steps are not urgently taken to address them, the country may run the risk of imploding into another political crisis in current dispensation

in Nigeria.

However, an amnesty deal in the Niger Delta significantly diffused the violence in that region at least temporarily, yet did not lead to a political and socio-economic solution to the problems. Another phase of political crisis of current dispensation is the Niger Delta problem, the area is inhabited by Andoni, Bek, Wara, Bini, Efik, Egbema Ekoi, Ibibio, Igbo, Yaw, Isoko, Itsekiri, Ogoni, Urhoko and several other ethnic pluralism, ethnicity and ethnic continents in Nigeria. The Niger Delta is reputed to be the third largest wetland in the world, which sustains a complex diversity, otherwise attractive to tourists, explorers, adventures, trade business men/woman, academicians and varieties of researchers.

The Niger Delta crisis is still raging. Every right thinking Nigeria sees this as a major problem, but also a complicated one. The consequences of a deepening and escalation of the crisis is too serious to be imagined. As people die and some get displaced and income to the economy divides. We are beginning to witness a journey to the precipice. But in such circumstances are the qualities of exceptional leadership required to help us navigate this peculiar terrain. The latest development of this crisis is the blow up of chevron oil of facilities, reducing Nigerian's oil production by another 100,000 barrels of oil per day. The cost of this can easily be quantified.

However, the daily cost in lives, especially lost lives, displaced lives, displaced villager and threatened people cannot be estimated. This crisis is of the greatest national scale, but nothing has been seen in government.

**Electoral Violence:** Electoral violence is any harm or threat of harm to any person or property involved in the electoral process, or to the election itself, during the election period [2-3]. IFES offers insight into the systematic and structural characteristics that electoral agencies need to employ to avoid need to electoral violence.

The 1999 general election prompted actions to form more parties from three political parties as: Alliance for Democracy (AD), All Peoples Party (APP) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) to thirty political parties in 2003. We all saw it as a guide to play politics with rules and regulations but it was not so. Section 39 (2) of Nigeria constitutions said that ballot box shall then be placed in full view of all present and so maintained until the close of poll.

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Every person intending to vote shall present himself to a presiding officer at the polling unit in the constituency in which his name was registered with his voter's card.

In the polling station, so many things happened in collaboration with the electoral personnel and party agents to rig elections. The ballot box which is supposed to be on the table will go into hide-out where agents of the ruling political party would thumb print all the ballot papers. Moreover, the electoral personnel's were paid quite a huge amount of money to collaborate in telling other parties that ballot papers had finished. Following the actions of the presiding officers in collaboration with the ruling party agents in sidelining other party agents usually leads to crisis in some areas, ending in killing and destruction of lives and properties. In Igbo-Eze North Local Government Area of Enugu State, PDP and ANPP clashed and four people died, about five cars were burnt. In Udi, still in Enugu State, AD governorship flag bearer, Emeka Eze was nearly killed by thugs on the election day.



During the National Assembly election held on April 12<sup>th</sup> 2003, the election was characterized by the use of thugs and terror gangs who intimidated and terrorized voters and ended up carrying ballot boxes in some places. More than 24 political thugs and fake election monitors were arrested in possession of odd guns, at Eleme, Tai and Gokana local Government Areas, scores of voters suffered harassment by law enforcement agents. Amadi Ama in Okirika was terrorized by some gun men who chased away voters and also stormed Ogbunabali area of Port- Harcourt and snatched six ballot boxes forcing policemen on duty to take to their heels. Some ballot boxes used for rigging were later found in the heap of refuse, behind the prison fence, along Creek Road in Port-Harcourt.

In Gokana Local government Area, Ben Nnanam, ANPP senatorial candidate was beaten up and the wind screen of his vehicle destroyed. Out of 23 Local Government Areas of the State, only about five had a peaceful election while 8 others were rocked with crisis. In plateau, violence trailed collation of result of plateau central senatorial district in parshin. Four people died and a dozen of others were injured when AD supporters revolt against the result. In Enugu, 15 people were also arrested when members of PDP and ANPP clashed. Ten locally made double-barreled and Italian made gun era recovered from the suspects. In Bayelsa, thugs were reported to have burnt the INEC office at Sagbama. The situation was the same in Bauchi where more than six persons were arrested in connection with electoral offences.

**Electoral Mal Practices:** In any objective political arrangement all over the world, election through the ballot boxes is recognized as the only credible barometer to determine power equation. However, one of the challenges facing Nigeria today is how to choose leaders at different levels of Government through a free and fair election. So, there are problems facing Nigeria electoral process which includes the absence of genuine and electronically generated voters register, the biggest problem confronting this nation today is absence of correct and genuine data. We cannot give accurate account of population figure. We don't have correct number of female and male population. Secondly, is the economic development and corruption; the dire economic development of the majority of Nigeria makes social vices like corruption to thrive and make the electorate susceptible to money-bag politicians. The lack of economic stability in the country is a strong motivator for corrupt individuals who are willing to subvert the electoral process by making elections a do or die affairs to ensure they get into public office with unfettered access to public funds and also in good position to influence those who are economically impoverished to trade their vote for as little as a Congo of rice or the sum of N200.00 only. Poverty on the other way round could be viewed as one of the factor against chosen credible leaders as having a free and fair election.

Judiciary and security; the functioning of the judiciary is imperative in any political system; the judiciary is one of the most important institutions for the electoral system. The Nigeria Judiciary is weakened by corruption, poor finding, inadequate facilities and large number of petitions and poor training of judiciary staff. These can only impact negatively on the adjudication of election issues and electoral malpractices absence of democratic culture; in ddressing this sub head.

The phenomenon has been part of nation's electoral process and political instability, which the country had experienced in the past. In the first republic, electoral crisis between Obafemi Awolowo leader of the then action group, Samuel Akintola his deputy led to a complete breakdown of law and order in the west which later snowballed into the famous "wild west" before a state of emergency was declared on the region by the federal authority.

The dust raised by the crisis was yet to settle down when young military officers led by the late Major Kaduna Nzeogwu organized the first military coup in the country which swept

away the leading politicians, particularly those of northern extraction among the political actors killed are: Ahmed Bello, the Saduana of Sokoto, Tafawa Balewa and Prime minister Samuel Akintola, premier of the western region and Dennis Osadebe, his counterpart in the mid-western region. A counter coup followed as many northern military officers felt the first coup was directed at their leaders and region. The fall out of counter coup led to 30 months Nigeria civil war.

**Economic Consequences:** Economy is the pillar of any nation be it developed or developing nation. When the economic base of a country is strong, it cannot be pushed over by any other nation so easily. But when it is weak due to the political crisis inherent, its image can be drag into the mind. We were made to know how much we invest in election and other matters in Nigeria politics, but never told what is in the hands of hooligans as a result of political crisis. It is very unfortunate that the government had adopted an arrogant, selfish, parochial and ultimately a failed approach to ameliorate problems. The youth who are the leaders of tomorrow are wrongly used as instrument of political violence in diverse ways which are detrimental to the nation. To look at some particular hooliganism were tailored towards economic destruction both in failed and present republic.

In the past republics, there were sporadic outburst of violence in some sections of the country the riot of 1960, 1964 elections and census crisis following Nigeria Civil war and other militia group springing up everywhere fighting against government and people. Following the incessant crisis in Nigeria in the first republic and military rule, it is alleged that 30,000 houses were burnt and properties worth over one million naira damaged.

Another awesome experience in Nigeria politics was 2003 and 2007 in both governorship and general election across the country. This was as a result of massive rigging and intimidation of the electorates that went to stop electoral malpractices aided by INEC and PDP the ruling party. As a result of these economic losses caused by electoral violence in Nigeria, political investors within and outside the country have been discouraged because it is widely believed that a country without a stable political system will not be able to guarantee the safety of their investors and investment.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the facts on ground and from the recorded events, the cause of political crisis in Nigeria right from pro to post independence till date are not farfetched. In the first place, Nigerian political system has been surrounded with crisis, since our so called political leaders cannot handle the affairs of this country in legally constitutional way, they choose to jeopardize and intimidate the poor masses, thereby turning everything against the wish of the constitution.

**Recommendation:** It is easier to point at a problem and suggest solutions to it but it is not easy to apply those solution to the eradication of such problem in many candid opinion, every problem has a solution, that this or that problem defines all solution is not true when seriousness is attached to it.

To tame political violence and electoral malpractices in our fledging democracy lies on independent national electoral commission (INEC) which will play their own primary role in making sure that election conducted in this country should be conducted in peace and harmony by ensuring that all the material needed during the process of election are been distributed to their various constituencies, coming on the side of the side of the constitution.



Another instance in vaulting ambition of some politicians to acquire political power which they believe is a gateway to economic power for them, to obtain it especially during election, they perform anything imaginable and height of it is assassination, they should understand what the great book, the Bible tells in Timothy 6-10 that the love of money is the root of all evil and in what shall we benefit when we gain the whole world and loss our souls, for good name is better than money, so there mind set should be re-oriented.

Furthermore, political crisis and electoral malpractice can be curbed only when the rules guiding elections is obeyed, when those people contesting for a particular position bears in mind that no comprise in the power, then each contestant will see his opponent as a friend and brother knowing fully well that every competition involves two or more parties must be won by one person, if this attitude is imbibed, politics will generate interest and conducive atmosphere for any nation. Government should encourage political parties with national spread and discourage the formation of tribal parties where the winner takes it all but looks for peace. To use the power of words to bond together and form a strategic alliance for social changes this if its done will reduce drastically political crisis and ensure stability

The Independent National Electoral Commission INEC, the body charged with the responsibility to conduct election should not be appointed by the government. According to section 14 of the third schedule of the 1999 constitution, there shall be for each state of the federation and the capital territory Abuja, a resident electoral commissioner who shall be appointed by the president. What this means is that the process of rigging starts from the presidency where loyal party men and women are appointed into electoral body. This provision in the constitution has been subjected to abuse in our democratic process in the sense that we have never had a chairman of the electoral commission who has not done the bidding of those in government that appointed him.

In conclusion, I think the most transparent solution to Nigerian's incessant political electoral and ethnic-religious is misunderstanding and greedy. The presidency sometimes takes a drastically economic reform and policies without sampling opinion of the masses. For instance, fuel tax that caused troubles between government and Nigeria labour congress (NLC) and fuel pump increase.

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