

## The Electoral Best Practices and Peace Building Strategy Towards Elections In Nigeria

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**Abstract.** The electoral periods in Nigeria has always come down with all forms of activities that can endanger both the electorates and the entire nation most especially as perpetrated by the political urchins either directly or indirectly, thus, creating an atmosphere of threat, intimidation, violence and insecurity. This to certain extent has negatively affected the dispositions of the electorates towards the electoral processes and probably towards the elections results which most often times were adjudged to be not free and fair. The need to therefore proffer viable solutions to this menace motivated the writing of this paper. This paper examines the perceptions and conditions of the electorates during the elections and highlights the mechanism for ensuring the creation of a peaceful and enabling environment during the electoral periods in Nigeria. This research employs analytical research methodology in getting the presented facts in this work. The findings in this research will help to provide proper guidance to the conduct of election and creation of sustainable peaceful and conducive environment during the process of elections in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Elections, Electorate, Peace-building, Strategy

### 1. Introduction

The Electoral processes which embraces peace building elements in its scheme is very germane in ensuring a peaceful and enabling environment most especially in the nations which are willing to prevent conflict situations which may arise before, during and after the conduct of elections. Elections in a democratic system is very important because it helps to perform certain numbers of functions which are essential in legalizing state's authority and most especially creating a peaceful society and where such are not properly handled it could create an

atmosphere of chaos and severe turbulence both to the political system and to the electorate generally. The process of election could be well drawn out to jettison all forms of hiccups and crisis by incorporating necessary peacebuilding strategy, tools and skills which can aid the peaceful and successful conduct of elections particularly in the third world nations like Nigeria where the process of election has been associated with all kinds of ills and troubles.

### 2. Conceptual Clarification

**Elections:** Elections constitute the very basic foundation upon which democracy is built. It is the process of choosing various people into the various political offices for the purpose of steering the leadership of a given institution or a state. According to Ellen Lust (2016) elections do not have a single influence (or set of influences); rather, the roles they play, and their influence on regime change, varies across time and space. Their role depends on a myriad of domestic and international factors, but primary among these is how elections fit within the logic and power-structure of the regime. Electoral processes held under conditions that meet global and regional standards for being credible give meaning to democracy's core values of political equality and the accountability of those who govern (Timothy D. Sisk, 2017).

**Electorate:** These are all people who are entitled to vote in a particular election, i.e. the body of all qualified voters within a given organization or society. Such persons must have gone through the process of accreditation in accordance with the electoral rules and procedures laid down by such institution.

**Democracy:** The word democracy comes from two Greek words: "demos" which means "people" and "kratos" which means "rule" (Daniel Tetteh Osabu,

2007). Democracy can be referred to as government in which the supreme power is vested in the people. In some forms, democracy can be exercised directly by the people; in large societies, it is by the people through their elected agents. In the words of President Abraham Lincoln, democracy is government of the people, by the people, and for the people. Certain core values of democracy includes; representation, participation and the observance of the rule of law.

**Peacebuilding:** It is a concept introduced in the year 1992 by the United Nation's Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali in the report of the UN Agenda for Peace. He defined the concept of peacebuilding as "action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid relapse into conflict." Peacebuilding "involves activities undertaken on the far side of conflict to reassemble the foundations of peace and provide the tools for building on those foundations something that is more than just the absence of war" (Brahimi, 2000). Peacebuilding is the process of creating self-supporting structures that "remove causes of wars and offer alternatives to war in situations where wars might occur." Conflict resolution mechanisms "should be built into the structure and be present there as a reservoir for the system itself to draw upon, just as a healthy body has the ability to generate its own antibodies and does not need ad hoc administration of medicine." (Galtung, J., 1975)

### 3. Theoretical Framework

This study employed the "Immanuel Kant theory of "Perpetual Peace. This is a theory that was developed in the 20th century and has been introduced by A Philosophical Sketch" published in 1795. In this theory, Kant tries to explore the main elements of a sovereign nation, what ought to be in terms of its stance towards other nations, government and masses attitude in order to achieve peaceful coexistence, and the conditions of external intervention in another nation affairs. This theory highlights factors that guarantees perpetual peace in a society and these are itemized as; treaties of peace without any precaution, the activation of the social contract set between government and people, the fact that nations should end the idea of the standing army in order to avoid wars, nations should work on realizing self-sufficiency economically, which helps in preventing conflicts, confirming nation's independence and refusing any intervention in its internal affairs, and lastly, in case of wars, nations should maintain the minimum of ethics even towards their enemy. The

deduction from this theory in relevance to this research is the fact that electoral processes is one of the important factors to achieve legitimization of authority and peaceful co-existence in the society, thus it should be pursued appropriately in order to achieve the desired result which is the prevention and elimination of all forms of conflict before, during and after election.

## 4. Literature Review

### 4.1 Election, Essence and Benefits

Elections are part of a process which helps to determine leadership either for continuity or change in leadership and eventually aid institutionalizing electoral integrity provided that subsequent electoral cycles reinforce key democratic or electoral principles (Timothy D. Sisk, 2017). Elections are key for fostering peace and stability in transitional settings and are often, as a result, one of the central elements of peace deals and transitional political accords (Annette M et' al., 2017). Elections are important components of political transitions and can help avert legitimacy crises by conferring domestic and international authority on governments (Fischer Jeff. 2002). An election is therefore an empirical demonstration of a citizen's liberty and political choice. It is for this that it serves to legitimise government. Properly managed elections provide a veritable platform for conflict resolution and transformation outside the battlefield and without bloodshed. Hence, the requirement of elections to be free and fair (Adelaja Odutola Odukoya, 2007). According to Wanyande (1987:80), 'elections represent a way of making a choice that is fair to all – one that leaves each member of the electorate with the reasonable hope of having his alternative elected'. The essence of election is summarized in the writing of Timothy D. Sisk (2017), who identified four principal functions of Elections as; Legitimization, Exercising accountability, Choosing 'representatives' and Exercising voice, aggregating preferences. Elections, however, also pose significant risks. Elections can mirror the underlying conditions and grievances in countries, provide sources of new conflict among groups, and trigger instability and violence. Poorly administered elections and elections beset by fraud or other forms of malfeasance can also lack legitimacy, and undermine support for the new government and the transition as a whole. (Annette M et' al)

In reality the electoral processes in Nigeria has become a lot of things in contrast to what it should be or rather meant to be. Nigeria's elections may be

described as mere practices. i.e., an exercise just for the fun of it. Douglas Anglin (1998) in justification of this argued that, ‘while much lip service is paid to the norms of free elections, too often the reality is a travesty of democracy’. Devoid of the attributes of freeness and fairness, elections become an empty shell, lacking any real democratic content. Elections in countries like Nigeria has also been identified as an Instrument for self-consolidation and sustenance, Villalón (1998) rightly argued in support of this view when he stated that; ‘Elections themselves may be a strategy for maintaining power and many African elections ... have been clearly intended to forestall change, or even strengthen the status quo’.

#### **4.2 Elections in Nigeria**

According to Thompson (1993), the democratic practice in the West African sub-region, (Nigeria inclusive) oscillates between pseudo-democracy and semi-democracy. He therefore suggests that it is imperative for the countries in the region to move from pseudo and semi-democracy to popular and people’s democracy. This among other things would require a new social contract built around developmental democratic states. Adelaja Odutola Odukoya (2007) gave a brief of the characterization of past elections in Nigeria as processes immersed in all kinds of atrocities. According to him, the three elections conducted since Nigeria’s return to democracy – in 1999, 2003 and 2007 – were anything but democratic. These elections were characterized by executive high-handedness, vote rigging, violence and zero-sum politics. Many prominent politicians – such as Chief Bola Ige, leader of the Alliance for Democracy (AD), who was serving in the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) government (on the President’s invitation) as the Attorney-General and Minister of Justice of the Federation; Alhaji Ahman Pategi, Chairman of the Kwara State PDP; Chief Harry Marshal, a PDP leader in Rivers State; Barrister Igwe and his wife; Sunday Ugwu; Hon. Odunayo Olagbaju, a member of the Osun State House of Assembly; Adamu Warri; Chief Dokibo, PDP Vice-chairman for South-South geopolitical zone, and Luke Shigaba, Chairman Bassa Local Government, Kogi State – were all suspected of being assassinated before the 2003 general elections. Engineer Funsho Williams and Dr. Ayo Daramola, both gubernatorial candidates of the ruling Peoples’ Democratic Party (PDP) in Lagos and Ekiti States, were also killed by suspected assassins just before the 2007 elections. It is curious that in most cases no one has been successfully prosecuted and convicted for these political killings. In the run up to and during the

2003 and 2007 elections, hundreds of Nigerians lost their lives in political violence.

### **5. Strategies towards the Enhancement of Positive Electoral Values**

Several writers have expressed their views as to the different principles that can facilitate successful and peaceful conducts of elections before, during and after the elections and prominent among such is the outline by the USAID which is tagged Electoral Best Practices. This study will examine these outlined principles vis-à-vis those proposed by other writers on this field of study.

USAID in January 2013 captioned its expected workable norms during election as Best Practices in Electoral Security, it is a proposal which should serve as a for the conduct of credible election and these are classified into three (3) categories which includes:

- Best Practices in Pre-Election Phase
- Best Practices in Election Day Phase
- Best Practices in Post-Election Phase

#### **5.1 Best Practices in the Pre-Election Phase**

The pre-election phase is the period of preparation for the election proper and this period is very strategic because it forms the bedrock for the actual election and if the processes in this stage are faulty everything is bound to go wrong thereafter. I call this ‘the incubation stage’ which involves activities that can have either an immediate, medium or long-term impact on the potential for electoral conflict to occur. This phase is believed to comprise of four main essential factors which are; electoral security legal frameworks; political party conflict management; political finance and electoral conflict; and security force electoral security training.

#### **5.2 Best Practices on the Election Day Phase**

This phase involves expected practices during the actual process of election. Such expected practices have been outlined to include; proper assessment of operations, well streamlined planning, usage of skillful and well trained workers capable conducting electoral security threat assessment and carrying out effective implementation. The planning process commences with the development of an electoral security concept, which is a strategic and operational scenario on the electoral security situation in each phase of the electoral cycle.

#### **5.3 Best Practices in the Post-Election Phase**

The post-election phase is identified with a whole lot of expected activities beginning with the closing of

polling stations and preliminary tabulation of ballots through adjudication of disputes, certification of results, and inauguration of victorious candidates. However, for the purposes of measuring the longevity of conflict connected with a past election, the postelection phase may be conceptually extended for several months after Election Day as acts of retribution related to election outcomes are committed over time. Post-election phase best practices are grouped into two thematic areas: electoral results management and electoral justice and mediation.

It is noteworthy that existing researches and the USAID Best Practices Electoral Security though provides important guides and directives to effective and peaceful electoral processes, they have not fully addressed all of the germane political strategies towards a sustainable positive electoral culture that can reduce conflict to the barest minimum and it is in the light of this that this paper hereby suggests workable electoral best practices discussed as follows:

**Election Monitoring:** To Anglin (1998: 472), election monitoring is a component of the peace packages for conflict resolution and transformation in the context of electoral democracy. Bjornlund et al. (1992: 406), election monitoring boosts confidence in the fairness of the electoral process; helps deter fraud in the balloting and counting procedures; reports on the integrity of the election; mediates disputes resulting from the election, and vouchsafes democratisation.

**Structural Reforms:** There is the need for serious institutional engineering, as the Ghana model has clearly shown. The many non-functional and weak institutions must be energised for political inclusiveness and efficacy. The police, judiciary, legislature, civil society groups, the mass media, political parties etc., need to be guided by the rule of law and the common good of society.

**Economic Development/Empowerment:** Economic well-being has been found to play an important role in democracy-building. Therefore the continued impoverishment, illiteracy, powerlessness and impoverished conditions of the majority of West African citizens are a clear negation of democracy. Where the people are not financially empowered, they become machinery for stomach infrastructure, i.e. living to merely exist which makes them yield to all kinds of motivation from where they can get their daily bread, so they become the instrument of violence in the hands of the few privileged political

urchins. This research describes the dearth of economic empowerment of the citizenry as ‘‘systematic deprivation’’ created for the purpose of sustaining the self-aggrandizement of the political leaders.

**Elections free of external influence:** Electoral processes justifies the sovereignty of a nation, but more often times, electoral processes are not actually free from external interference and Nigeria is not an exception. Such external influence may include; ethnic affinity, religious affinity, financial backing of regional economic blocks, acquisition of military support and etc. Thus, where there is external influence on electoral processes of a nation, the interest of the citizenry is jeopardized at the expense of the elements of external actors. There is therefore the urgent needs to jettison a democracy that promotes external interests as against the interests of the citizenry.

**Freedom of the Press and Freedom of Expression:** The media is regarded as the fourth estate in governance and where it is hampered or encumbered; it negatively affects the citizenry as they will be shut out of getting the necessary information towards the exercise of the individual and collective franchise. Where both the press and the people are free to voice out their opinions, the truth becomes irrepressible as hiding facts and agendas are projected into the public and it becomes difficult to propagate unwholesome practices during elections.

**Non Partisan Security Agents:** For the conduct of peaceful elections, best security environments need to be ensured, where voters can cast their ballots in the absence of fear or intimidation, unfortunately, this is not the case in Nigeria. In Nigeria, the Security Agencies who are supposed to protect the interest of the common citizens and stand up against unjust and oppressive conduct of elections are often seen to be the perpetrators of all kinds of evil and unethical practices during the election because they are mere instruments in the hands of the incumbent authority.

**Enhanced Participatory Environment:** The participatory environment relates to the ability of citizens to participate in the electoral process, including marginalized groups such as ethnic or religious minorities, internally displaced persons and refugees, women, and persons with disabilities, but also to ‘‘parallel power structures’’, including traditional and religious leaders, among others. Elections have greater legitimacy when the participatory environment is more inclusive.

## 6. Findings

It is discovered in this research that peaceful conduct of elections aids the enhancement of peaceful co-existence of the diverse kinds of people and interest in the nation. Most significant discovery in this research is that the attitude of the people is germane in ensuring a peaceful conduct of election because where there is display of negative attitude by the citizenry, there will be passive participation and it affects the outcome of the election. On a final note, this research discovers the need for the government to ensure a level playing ground among the citizenry during electoral processes by setting out viable plans and programmes towards electoral security that are adequately monitored and effectively implemented and this has been one of the major pitfalls in the Nigeria electoral processes.

## 7. Conclusion

Ensuring a peaceful conduct of election and sustainable peace thereafter at all stages demands the perfect understanding and positive proactive actions of all the stakeholders comprising of the State, the Citizenry and the Non-Governmental Organisations. Where there is poor understanding, there will be bad responses and where this occurs the electoral process goes sour and produces mixed reactions and bitterness and most often times such reactions are volatile like some of the occurrences in the past electoral processes in Nigeria which lingering effects are still very much obvious on the political terrain of the nation. It is to this extent that this research has considered certain positive principles that can help to ensure peaceful conduct of election in Nigeria towards actualizing sustainable peaceful environment. If positive attitude is projected it will enable peaceful co-existence and security consciousness towards elections, then the nation is bound to have a safe, free and fair election and it will culminate into national development.

## 8. Recommendations

For the purpose of conducting peaceful election and ensuring a sustainable peaceful environment during the electoral processes in Nigeria, this recommends that Electoral Best Practices should be introduced into the Nigerian Educational Curriculum right from the Secondary School up to the Higher institution of learning, because the enhancement of National Security can be projected through Peace Education which inculcates in the learners the need for collective responsibility which must include good

governance by the political leadership and effective loyalty by the people (Ogoh, 2008). Peace education is designed to build in the learners a sense of commitment to global solidarity, peace, acceptance of differences in opinions, social justice and environmental awareness since it aims at empowering the children to participate in bringing about constructive change both locally and internationally instead of resorting to violence as medium for displaying their unacceptance of public policies or programmes (Fountain, 2012). Furthermore, the National Orientation Agency should be made to arise from its comatose state and development national programmes to be projected through the media which will sensitize the citizenry towards positive proactive attitude during the process of election.

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