
ELECTIONEERING IN NIGERIA: CITIZENS' KNOWLEDGE
OF RESPONSIBILITY AND ENGAGEMENT

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Abstract

This paper examined electioneering in Nigeria as one of the most delicate citizens' responsibility. It also examined citizens' knowledge of electioneering as a civic responsibility with special reference to the level of engagement. It also appraised reoccurring electioneering issues over the years in Nigeria. From the era of Past Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) including; Election Commission of Nigeria (ECN, 1959-1963), Federal Electoral Commission (FEC, 1963-1966), Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO, 1979-1983), National Electoral Commission (NEC, 1986-1993), National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON, 1993-1998), and now Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC, 1998-date), there have been pressing electioneering issues. These issues include eligible citizens who refused to register for voters' cards; citizens who registered but did not collect their voting cards; citizens who collected their cards but refused to vote; buying and selling of voters' cards and snatching of ballot boxes among others. All these aforementioned issues have revealed that citizens may not have the in-depth knowledge of electioneering responsibility and that

of engagement in spite of civic values acquired within the formal and informal settings through socializing agents. The paper recommended among others the need to re-educate Nigerian citizens on the importance of electioneering responsibility and engagement.

Keywords: Electioneering, Responsibility, Engagement, Social Studies, Education, Civic Education,

Introduction

The teaching of subjects such as Civic Education and Social Studies among others in school does assist in the inculcation of electioneering responsibilities and engagements among citizens. Despite this, Nigeria citizens still display a lackadaisical attitude towards electioneering responsibility. Furthermore, in spite of the exposure of citizens to the norms and values of the society (both in formal and informal setting) via agents of socialization such as the family, school, mass media, religious institutions, peer and neighborhood/community, it has been observed that citizens have little or no knowledge of electioneering responsibility let alone that of engagement.

Contrary to what most people believe, the electioneering process does not start and end on polling day. Elections involve several time-bound elements that constitute the electoral cycle (Aghamelu, 2013). These elements encompass registration for voters' card, collection of permanent voters' card, campaigns, voting, and Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) ad-hoc officials' services among others. This indicates that all these elements have a contributory role that culminates in a successful electioneering process. Consequently, The Global Commission on Elections, Security and Democracy (2012) opined that every component of the electoral cycle is important to the outcome and therefore must be given adequate consideration. The Global Commission on Elections, Security and Democracy further assert that activities during the electioneering process include Electoral Laws, Party Internal Democracy, Voter Registration Exercise, Campaign and Campaign financing, Voting process, Results

Declaration, Assessing the Electoral Management Body (EMB) and Good Governance. This connotes that every aspect of electioneering is very vital and no aspect is dispensable.

It is pertinent to reinforce that the ideal in a democratic society is that citizens are actively involved in their own governance and that such participation is based on an informed and critical reflection of civic issues. The success of such a society is built on citizenship that is informed and engaged. Also, the knowledge of electioneering responsibility and engagement acts as the foundation for a successful democracy and sustained future. It also impacts important electioneering attributes; for example, electioneering knowledge promotes democratic values, political participation, trust in public life and/or public figures, and can change attitudes on important social issues (Hatcher, 2011; Coley & Sum, 2012).

Furthermore, reoccurring electioneering issues over the years have revealed that citizens may not have the knowledge of electioneering responsibility and that of engagement. From the era of Past Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) including; Election Commission of Nigeria (ECN, 1959-1963), Federal Electoral Commission (FEC, 1963-1966), Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO, 1979-1983), National Electoral Commission (NEC, 1986-1993), National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON, 1993-1998), and now Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC, 1998-date), there have been pressing electioneering issues (Agbaje & Adejumobi, 2006; Omotola, 2010; Momah, 2016).

These issues include citizens' refusal to register for voters' cards; citizens who registered but did not collect their voting cards; citizens who collected their cards but refused to vote; invalid votes, buying and selling of voters' cards; multiple voting; buying and selling of votes; snatching of ballot boxes; burning of ballot papers; confiscation of voting materials; disruption of voting procedure among others. Also, in the aspect of campaign, issues like embezzlement of funds by campaign managers, disorderliness of electoral law and order; violence embedded campaigns among others.

All the aforementioned electioneering issues do not portray that citizens have knowledge of electioneering responsibility and engagement. These issues have jeopardized unity and integration in the country. If they persist, it may be difficult to achieve the Article A of Section 1 overall philosophy of the nation as stated by the Federal Government of Nigeria (2013) in National Policy on Education (NPE) that “live in unity and harmony as one indivisible, indissoluble, democratic and sovereign nation founded on the principles of freedom, equality and justice” (p 1). Also, Section 6, Article (a) of the NPE asserted that one of the goals of education in Nigeria is “the development of the individual into a morally sound, patriotic and effective citizen” (p 1). In other words, the success of a nation is built on a citizenship that is informed and engaged, most especially in the area of electioneering which is a civic responsibility.

Electoral issues are common and they are not supposed to be so because of citizens’ exposure to the inculcation of civic values within the formal setting and informal settings through a process of education known as socialization.

It has been observed that an average Nigerian citizen has little or no knowledge of electioneering responsibility let alone engaging in electioneering activities. This seems to have created a vacuum resulting in low level of participation in electioneering activities such as registration for voters’ card, collection of permanent voters’ card, voting and ad hoc staff duties (such as collating officers, accreditation officers, corps members and returning officers’) among others.

The passive attitude of citizens to electioneering responsibility may be as a result of little or inadequate knowledge of electioneering responsibility or lack of knowledge about the importance of electioneering engagement. This has been the concern of scholars, for instance, Durotoye (2014), Falade (2014), Omede and Ojibara (2017), Oboh (2017) and Nkwede (2019) amongst others have eloquently opined that the nonchalant attitude of citizens to electioneering responsibility and engagement is a poor state of affair which should not occur because of the knowledge of civic responsibilities that citizens acquire within the

formal and informal settings through socializing agents. Despite the teaching of subjects such as Civic Education and Social Studies among others in schools that could assist in the inculcation of electioneering responsibility and engagement in citizens, citizens in southwestern Nigeria still display a lackadaisical attitude towards electioneering responsibility and that of engagement. Also, In spite of the exposure of citizens to the norms and values of the society (both in formal, informal and non-formal settings) via agents of socialization, citizens in southwestern Nigeria still display a nonchalant attitude towards electioneering responsibility and that of engagement.

Low levels of citizens' knowledge of electioneering responsibility and engagement (Falade; 2014; Olasupo, 2015; Aleyomi & Ajakaiye, 2016; Adetoro & Omiyefa, 2017) have been recorded in educationally developed states in recent times. This is alarming because educationally less developed states performed better (INEC, 2008-2019). It is expected that all types of education (be it formal, informal and non-formal) should imbue citizens with cognitive abilities that allow for more critical thinking, which may then foster intense civic responsibilities with effective civic participation.

Premised on the background and the concern of scholars, if electioneering issues such as non-registration of eligible citizens for voters' cards; registered citizens without voters' cards; citizens with voters' cards who refuse to vote; invalid votes; buying and selling of voters' cards; disruption of voting procedure and disorderliness of electoral law among others persist, there may be non-realization of affective domain of learning contents of civic responsibilities and engagement related school subjects (Social Studies and Civic Education among others), non-attainment of agents of socialization roles, unsustainable democracy and extinction of democratic values.

The purpose of this study is to assess the knowledge of citizens' level of electioneering responsibility and that of engagement in southwestern Nigeria. Aforementioned discourse stirs up the following thought-provoking questions:

- a What is the level of citizens' knowledge of electioneering responsibility in Nigeria?
- b What is the level of citizens' electioneering engagement in Nigeria?
- c Are socialization agents responsible for citizens' knowledge of electioneering responsibility and engagement in Nigeria?

Electioneering

Electioneering processes have to do with the totality of the activities involved in campaigns and mobilizing the citizens of a country for elections, these activities do not exclude the electoral body conducting the elections (Arowolo & Alako, 2010; Ekwueme & Folarin, 2017; Nkwede, 2019). It is the most popular civic responsibility with formalized and systematized procedure. It is also the periodic selection of government representatives of the people at various levels of governance by the electorate themselves. In the quest to conceptualize electioneering, Rasheed (2016) eloquently posited that it can also be perceived as:

the entire or series of activities engaged in by persons who have agreed to submit themselves to elections, their political parties, groups, communities, political associations, friends, families and others in order to influence the anticipated preference of the electorate or choosers positively. (p. 15)

The above indicates that electioneering encompasses all the activities that trigger the voting public to support candidates in elections. By law, the Election Management Body (EMB) regulates the activities of political parties especially during the electioneering process. This includes the monitoring of political parties to encourage internal democracy especially during party primaries and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has been in charge since 1998 till date. At this juncture, it is pertinent to take a cursory look at "election". An election can be defined as the definite process of selecting one or more persons for identified position or positions out of the more than the required number of

persons that are interested in and who have submitted themselves to judgments on the scale of preference of others who equally have right to the position or office but are not ready or interested in occupying it, at least for the defined period of time (Akinwalere, 2015). Therefore, election is the process of choosing candidate(s) of one's choice for an elective position. Furthermore, this connotes that through voting, people make their voices to be heard in terms of choosing which candidate should occupy identified positions at every level. By so doing, the voting public exercise control of the fate of their nation. In other words, elections are voters' source of power and this is why Rasheed (2016) referred to elections as "the centerpiece of democracy" (p 15).

Electioneering Responsibility and Engagement: The Role of the Agents of Socialization

The process by which people learn characteristics of their group's norms, values, attitudes, and behaviours which is known as socialization has been identified as a key factor in fostering electioneering responsibility and engagement. Research has shown that the importance of socializing agents in any society is a catalyst for active voting participation on the part of citizens. This indicates that socializing agents such as the home, the family, the neighborhood/community, the school, religion institutions, mass media and peer groups transmit to people different goals different goals and behaviours (Disca, 2015 & Fronas, 2016). They also instill a sense of commitment to work for the common good, which in turn makes it more likely they will join a community organization where it is possible to take action, thus creating the ideal society. Furthermore, it should be noted that an important goal of Civic Education is to help students attain a sense of structural integration and inclusion within their nation-states and clarified national identities. Moreover, research reveals that the content and methods of school-based civics and culturally responsive teaching can promote structural inclusion and reduce failed citizenship. Research by Callahan and Muller (2013) suggested that the civic knowledge that students attain along with high levels of social connection within schools increase the civic efficacy and

engagement most especially in electioneering process in and outside the school. Consequently, courses that teach civic knowledge within classrooms and schools that promote high levels of social connection among students can help them to develop a sense of electioneering responsibility.

In the light of this, knowledge of electioneering responsibility and engagement among Nigerian citizens is critical to participating actively in democracy and good governance. The development and growth of a society largely depends on the wellbeing of its members and their awareness to be citizens in good standing. Findings recently have revealed that to attain a society suitable to live in is predicated on individual member's knowledge of his/her electioneering responsibility in the society and also his/her engagement in such responsibility, which are acquired within the four walls of the school via the formal curriculum and in the society at large via the informal curriculum (Falade, 2014; Giulia, Michela, Jill, Alessio, & Massimo, 2016).

Studies have also reported that a major source of influence on electioneering responsibility and engagement is education (Ejue & Ekanem, 2011; Falade, 2014; Omede & Ojibara, 2017). Some of the links here are directly from the enhancement of the specific knowledge, skills or motivations which are targeted by the school curriculum. For example, knowledge of electioneering responsibility can be increased through Civic Education if an appropriate pedagogical approach is adopted (Niemi & Junn, 1998). This connotes that knowledge, skills and values acquired as a result of education has a positive influence on citizens' knowledge of electioneering responsibility and engagement in their societies as reported by aforementioned studies.

However, the relationship between education, electioneering responsibility and engagement is much more wide-ranging than just the specific knowledge, skills or motivations targeted by the curriculum; educational effects generalize to a wide range of aspects of engagement behaviours. For example, Jenkins, Andolina, Keeter and Zukin (2003) reported that students who attend schools which provide civic training in skills (e.g., in letter writing and debating) are more likely to be involved in organizations outside

school, to sign petitions, to participate in boycotts, to follow political news, to engage in charitable fund-raising and to attend community meetings. They also found that students who participate in various aspects of electioneering responsibility such as electoral officers in schools, voting of class representatives and governors in classrooms are more likely to volunteer regularly, to work on community problems, to participate in charity fund-raising, and to try and influence other people's voting.

Furthermore, it has been found that involvement in formal groups (e.g., religious groups, sports groups, among others) in which the individual is able to take on active and specific roles is related to prosocial-oriented electioneering participation (Albanesi, Cicognani & Zani, 2007). This implies that young people who belong to a club or team are much more likely to be involved in community service. In the opinions of Oboh (2017) and Zaff, Moore, Papillo and Williams (2008), people who have high levels of religious attendance and religious activity are more likely to be civically and politically active and young people who participate in community-based organizations and in extra-curricular activities are more likely to participate both civically and politically later in life.

Citizens' Knowledge of Electioneering Responsibility and Engagement

Citizens' knowledge of electioneering entails the awareness of their civic responsibilities. These responsibilities entail payment of taxes, electoral processes (registration, collection of permanent voters' card, voting and engaging as INEC ad-hoc officials) and community development projects [such as building of bridges, construction of drainages, security measures (vigilante) among others].

Electioneering responsibilities include participation in government, social/religious engagement and memberships of voluntary associations (Schwarzer, 2011; and Coley and Sum, 2012). This indicate that actions of electioneering responsibility can be displayed in advocacy for various causes such as political, economic, civil, and environmental or quality of life issues. Electioneering engagement on the other hand is a process whereby

citizens become active participants in building and strengthening of their communities. Also, in the opinion of Chenneville, Toler and Gaskin-Butler (2012), it is also a multidimensional concept which includes knowledge, skills, and identity, all of which can be encouraged with appropriate formal and informal experiences. Formal experiences connote experiences within the four walls of educational organizations while informal experiences encompass the inherent roles of socializing agents.

Recently, it may be inferred from the attitude of Nigerian citizens, most especially citizens in the Southwest attitudes towards participation in electioneering process (Falade; 2014; Olasupo, 2015; Aleyomi & Ajakaiye, 2016; Adetoro & Omiyefa, 2017) that it does not seem as if they have the knowledge of electioneering responsibility or that of political participation let alone of being engaged because of their lackadaisical attitude towards electioneering responsibility. Take for instance, in recent times; there is an evidence of paucity of knowledge of electioneering responsibility among Southwest citizens as reported by INEC (2019). The number of uncollected permanent voter cards (Ekiti = 243,376, Osun = 413,911, Oyo = 757,755, Ogun = 680,136, Lagos = 1,038,902, Ondo = 343,886) recorded in Southwest Nigeria for the 2019 general elections in spite of consistent awareness through mass media for cards collection was alarming (INEC, 2019).

Furthermore, reoccurring electioneering issues over the years have revealed that citizens may not have the knowledge of electioneering responsibility and that of engagement or they may have little knowledge and/or low level of knowledge of electioneering responsibility and that of engagement. From the era of Election Commission of Nigeria (ECN, 1959-1963) and now Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC, 1998-date), there have been pressing electioneering issues. These issues include citizens who refused to register for voters' cards; citizens who registered but did not collect their voting cards; citizens who collected their cards but refused to vote; invalid votes, buying and selling of voters' cards; multiple voting; buying and selling of votes; snatching of ballot boxes; burning of ballot papers; confiscation of

voting materials; disruption of voting procedure among others. Also, in the aspect of campaign, issues like embezzlement of funds by campaign managers, disorderliness of electoral law and order; violence embedded campaigns among others. All the aforementioned electioneering issues do not portray that citizens have the knowledge of electioneering responsibility and engagement.

Consequently, in order to investigate the rate at which Nigerian citizens have acquired knowledge of electioneering responsibility and that of engagement, the findings of study of some selected local government areas in Ondo state, Nigeria conducted by Falade (2014) have revealed that 57% of the participants were not actively involved in electioneering activities, thus there is low level of electioneering engagement in Ondo State, Nigeria in 2014. Furthermore, in the opinion of Falade, many Nigerians are not committed to the electioneering responsibility and engagements because of apathy, nonchalant attitude and lack of citizens' knowledge in the area of electioneering responsibility. In the same vein, findings of study conducted by Adetoro and Omiyefa (2017) which comprised 32,000 adult residents of four wards in Abeokuta metropolis, Ogun state have shown that there is low level of electioneering engagement among citizens because they were not obliged to electioneering experience, engagement and the process.

Similarly, in the year 2016, 1,647,973 citizens registered to vote in the Ondo State gubernatorial election, out of which 584,997 voters were accredited while 580,887 votes were cast. A total of 551,272 votes were valid and 29,615 votes were rejected across the eighteen local government areas in the state (INEC, 2016). Also, in 2018 Ekiti gubernatorial election, the number of registered voters is 909,585 out of which 405,865 voters did accreditation. The total valid votes recorded was 384,594 and 18,857 votes were rejected (INEC, 2018). These results indicated low levels of knowledge of electioneering responsibility and engagement among Ondo and Ekiti States in year 2016 and 2018 respectively.

Despite the importance of knowledge of electioneering responsibility and engagement, many reports have expressed concern about the levels of citizens' knowledge of electioneering

responsibility and engagement in Ghana, Malaysia, Italy, USA, UK, Germany and England among others (Hatcher, 2011; Coley & Sum, 2012; Ahmadu, Madya, Yahya & Ismail, 2016; VanCamp & Baugh, 2016). In addition, research findings have revealed that adolescents' and young adults' knowledge of electioneering responsibility and engagement are below desirable levels (Lochocki, 2010; Torney-Purta, 2010; Coley & Sum, 2012; Falade, 2013; Barrett & Brunton-Smith, 2014; Adetoro & Omiyefa, 2017). This lack of knowledge is an eye opener because the link between the knowledge of electioneering responsibility and engagement means that one consequence of this is a widely documented decline in the electioneering participation of citizens (Robelen, 2011; Omede & Ojibara, 2017). Therefore, it is pertinent for agents of socialization to re-educate or re-instill in citizens civic competency necessary for effective civic participation.

Factors Affecting Citizens' Electioneering Engagement in Nigeria

1. **Lack of confidence in political leaders:** Attitude of past political leaders towards the realization of their formulated manifestoes has built timidity into citizens such that they no longer have confidence in their political leaders. In a study conducted by Falade (2014) in some selected Local Government Areas in Ondo State, Nigeria, it was discovered that majority (53%) of the respondents had no confidence in their political leaders. This may be because political leaders usually leave their promises unfulfilled after being elected.
2. **Violence Embedded Electoral Process:** Violence has become recognized with Nigeria's political beliefs such that almost all elections held so far in the country are violent-centered. Similar studies, Ojo (2014) and Okpi (2011) posited that Nigeria general elections in the past were marked with some irregularities such as malpractices and violence, cases of underage voting, distribution of money at polling centers, manipulation of voters' register, and confiscation of electoral materials, ballot box, and unlawful possession of firearms

among others. This political situation propagated unenthusiastic political attitude and participation among some citizens.

3. Lack of INEC Machinery for Intensive Supervision of Electoral Process: the Independent National Electoral Commission should put in place machinery that will ensure mass participation of the electorates during the elections in Nigeria. INEC should be more transparent and unbiased at every stage of the electioneering process. The electoral process should be without sentiment, favoritism, fraud, violence and intimidation. Citizens who violate electoral procedure and policies should face the wrath of the law. This will help to build confidence in the populace and thereby enhance positive political participation.
4. Election Rigging: Election rigging according to Nwabueze (2003) cited in Nwokeke and Jayum (2011) refers to:

electoral manipulations which are palpable illegalities committed with a corrupt, fraudulent or sinister motive to influence an election in favour of a candidate (s) by way such as illegal voting, bribery, treating and undue influence, intimidation and other form of force exerted on the electorates, falsification of results, fraudulent announcement of a losing candidate as the winner (without altering the recorded results). (p.129)

The above quote connote that election rigging encompass any form of unjustified authority that influence and maneuver election result in questionable manner to protect a particular interest against the interest of the majority of the populace. Election rigging can frustrate the interest of the people hence the questionable imposition of an unaccepted candidate. Election rigging has taken many forms in Nigeria. Some ways by which elections are rigged in Nigeria according to Ibrahim (2007) cited in Nwokeke and Jayum (131:2011) include illegal printing of voters' cards; illegal possession of ballot boxes; stuffing of ballot boxes; falsification of election results; illegal thumb-printing of ballot papers; infant voting;

compilation of fictitious names on voters' lists; illegal compilation of separate voters' lists; illegal printing of forms used for collection and declaration of election results; deliberate refusal to supply election materials to certain areas; announcing results in places where no elections were held; unauthorized announcement of election results; harassment of candidates, agents, and voters; change of list of electoral officials and box-switching and inflation of figures.

5. **Lack of Freedom to partake in Electoral Process:** The lack of freedom to participate effectively in electioneering process in Nigeria is an abysmal reoccurring electioneering issue. Freedom to partake in free and fair elections will make the citizens to appreciate the values of democracy but in situations where imposition of wrong candidates on the people, lack of people's participation and absence of leadership accountability is the order of the day. One would not expect citizens to have freedom to partake in electoral process (Moshood, 2009) because these issues have crippled the level of citizens' participation in electioneering activities.
6. **The Bane of "Stomach infrastructure" :** This phrase is used to describe the voters' preference swift gains like food stuffs and money. In the opinion of Durotoye (2014), "Stomach infrastructure entered the political lexicon of Nigeria after the June 2014 Ekiti State Governorship Election. The two major political parties shared rice, kerosene, cooking oil and money to woo voters prior to the August 9 election" (p. 4). This issue reoccurred in the last general elections. It was referred to as "Dibo Ki O Se Obe" by citizens in South West Nigeria. Literally, this imply "Vote and prepare soup". This popular phrase may also weaken the urge of citizens to participate effectively in electioneering process.

Conclusion

Despite the teaching of subjects such as Civic Education and Social Studies among others in schools that could assist in the inculcation of electioneering responsibility and engagement and also the exposure of citizens to the norms and values of the society (both in formal and informal settings) via agents of socialization such as the family, school and neighborhood amongst others, it has been observed that an average Nigerian citizen has little knowledge of electioneering responsibility let alone engaging in electioneering activities. This seems to have created a vacuum resulting in low level of participation in electioneering activities. The passive attitude of citizens to electioneering responsibility may be as a result of little or inadequate knowledge of electioneering responsibility or lack of knowledge about the importance of electioneering engagement. If this situation persists, there may be unsustainable democracy, extinction of democratic values, non-realization of affective domain of learning and paucity of community projects amongst others.

Ways Forward

1. Agents of socialization should re-educate and re-instill in citizens civic competencies necessary for effective civic participation through adequate reinforcement of the importance of electioneering responsibility to citizens.
2. Absolute civic knowledge is indispensable; therefore, reorientation of people about their civic responsibilities and effective participation must be taken into consideration through formal and informal channels.
3. The media must be strictly used in the dissemination of information and provide orientation necessary for electioneering process to citizens. The media must teach electioneering ethics and it must be free from political interference and prejudice.
4. The school system should not only focus on the cognitive aspect of Civic education and Social Studies curricular at all levels of educational system in Nigeria. The affective domain

of these curricular should be reinforced so as to produce functional citizens who are not only informed but engaged most especially, in the area of electioneering which is a civic responsibility.

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