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## Unsavoury Nigerian Politics and Politicians

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### **Abstract:**

*The study examines the intrigues that characterize the political space in Nigeria on a typical day and periods of electioneering processes. It drew and beamed its searchlight on the unwholesome, despicable and untoward actions of politicians as they connive with the security agencies which copiously contravene the rules of engagement, the Act establishing them and the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The study largely relied on oral interview, focus group discussion with few secondary sources to underscore how uniquely political actors "play the game" in Nigeria. From the analysis, it was revealed that, politics of Nigerian politicians is not a call to or for service and welfare of the people, but for personal aggrandizement, subservience to 'godfather' and to criminally share the country's common patrimony. It was therefore recommended among other things that; electoral offenders should be severely punishment within the ambit of the law to deter others.*

**Keywords:** Politics, politicians, security, crime, governance, Nigeria

### **1. Background**

The trajectory of Nigerian democracy is seen as a hoax and at best described as "groping in unending experimentation in governance and government". In some climes, politics is seen and regarded as a call for total service to one's fatherland. It suggests sacrifice involving money, time and other resources that can propel the growth and development of that society and further consolidate human relations. As observed by Ayuk (2015), issues in, and of politics should be more organised to create conditions that are people-driven, generate income, increase wellbeing, reduce vulnerability and improve security.

No doubt, politics as being alluded to, is a struggle, contestation, agreement and disagreement by persons under a platform (party in Nigeria; in some other countries, independent candidacy) to access power via people's mandates, with the sole aim of authoritatively allocating resources – provide security and welfare for the general welfare of the society. However, this process, even though structured, especially in the Nigerian context, it should observe basic democratic tenets (within the framework of the rule of law) to reflect sense of civility and orderliness. The ideals of effective livelihood that recognizes impartiality which is tied on security, employment, infrastructure etc. should be a direct correlation that fundamentally defines politics.

Unfortunately, politics in the truest sense in Nigeria is a travesty painted with different colours of brinkmanship, lawlessness, threats and counter-threats, which ultimately leads to breakdown of law. An average politician in Nigeria is a law to himself especially if he or she is in the party in power. They exhibit clear disdain to the law, impunity reigns supreme and characteristically self-serving. More appalling is the fact that, conversations in this sphere has always been "winner takes all", including not only appointive positions but the common wealth of the nation; and decide illegitimately how to loot what, who and how to the detriment of the citizens.

Again, there exists an inverse relationship when one fraudulently assumes power, in that, a clear wall of demarcation is established between the electorates they hoodwinked into political office(s) – a narrative of "elitism" defines and classifies them, with their "godfather" in a prebendalistic engagement. In this circumstance, service which is the hallmark of politics becomes secondary as their loyalty at this instance is to the "godfather" and themselves. For them, Nigerians can starve to death for all they care – even more concerning is that, this strategy is reinforced to perpetually consign majority of people to poverty so that they can be easily manipulated to continuous servitude (Ayuk, 2018).

### 1.1. *Uncommon Politics of a Nigerian Politician*

Who is a Nigerian politician? It is indeed an apt question that demands an urgent and dispassionate answer. A typical player in the political arena of Nigeria is conscienceless, no integrity, operates without decorum befitting of politics, they brim with hate, hurl abuse at Nigerians, tell lies, huff and puff with uncouth manner (Ayuk, 2018 & Olufemi, 2009). For them, violence equals power, and people must die for their political expediency, electorates are inconsequentially treated and dispatched at their biddings.

A regular Nigerian politician is self-serving and seeking, frowns at constructive criticism, self-imposing with undue threat to political opponents, greedy, maverick with penchant for corruption. Politicians in Nigeria operate in a trajectory that is/are unknown to our laws – immune from prosecution. They even use the security outfits (the Police, Military, Secret Service etc.) to perpetrate this rather ingenious charade in the name of politics. They have perfected and rehearsed lies to strengthen their political atrocities against the Nigerian state. Primarily, what salves their political drive is to access power not for service but to steal and loot our common resources.

Even more absurd, they operate as self, their self, themselves, with a foundation built in lies and smeared on subterfuge. Their expertise is conspiratorial, treachery, blackmail and vaulting ambition which overleaps itself and falls on the others (Ayuk, 2018 & Shakespeare in Okonkwo, 2014). Nigeria political space as presently constituted has not significantly or paradigmatically shifted as it was in the first, second and third republics. No wonder therefore, the dramatis persona still describe and use words as nascent, emerging, developing, evolving etc. to depict this kind of politics vis-à-vis democracy which in truism cannot fit in or considered as “democratic governance”.

In fact, Nigerian politicians right from independence in 1960, had in their orientation a narrative of violence and a “do-or-die” mentality i.e. winner takes all, profoundly nepotistic, tribalistic and clannish. In Nigeria, political parties are formed bereft of ideologies, no objective or objectives in respect to service, but for personal interests and ultimately to steal basically; and as adduced by Okonkwo (2014), parties are inclined to cater for certain local interests in the country. For instance, the earliest political parties had their spread and stronghold regionally as reflected in respective elections. For example, the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons, later called National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), formed on 26<sup>th</sup> August, 1944 had and was overwhelmingly an eastern region followership appeal; the Northern People Congress formed on December 1949 had its base in the northern region, while the Action Group emerged in March 1951 and had western region dominance, Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU), the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) stood for the middle belters. All of these parties had their allegiance first and foremost to their respective regions, cronies and families, and project Nigeria consequentially secondary. Okonkwo (2014) adds, “Northern People Congress (NPC), a northern political party, somehow was almost a political monolith following the preponderance of one fanatical religion and the way it (North) had been groomed by the colonial masters, it never concentrated its activities in the South and East” of Nigeria.

Just as it was in the 60s regarding the unique traits of an average Nigerian politician, inherent in their quest for relevance, authors carpet-crossing when their interests are threatened on the basis of non-performance and parochialism, divisiveness to the corporate existence of the country. They manipulate the minds of poor Nigerians of whom poverty is hoisted on them deliberately via obnoxious laws and policies they enact with the overriding reason for them not to be empowered socially, economically and politically. Through this method, the electorates are devalued, gullible and become their political poodles who on their behest can commit any atrocities (killings, kidnapping, snatching of election materials, etc.), all in an attempt to remain in power.

Nigerian politicians weaponize their un-informed followers with reactionary political viewpoints to validate election malpractice, encourage open victimization of others with divergent view(s), hate and discriminatory rhetoric against opponents. For them, crude and excessive rigging by all means to get elected means politics and democracy.

### 1.2. *Crimes in Nigeria Election, Post Election and Governance*

A typical election day or days in Nigeria is akin to warfare expressed in mutual distrust, hostility, fierce inter-ethnic strife, snatching and stashing of ballot boxes, physical combat, shooting resulting to killings, burning of houses and vehicles, and vandalization of property. Nigerian political leaders sadly and shamelessly exhibit very uncivil and barbaric disposition. Where elections are held, rigging is overtly carried out and as captured by Okonkwo (2014), elections are not held consequent upon the fact that candidates of dominant parties are considered so “good and eligible” they were all returned unopposed (in the Nigerian political shenanigan, “Carry Go”).

The brigandish that ensues in election days spares nobody (class, age, sex notwithstanding) of its throes and woes, if you resist or attempt to stop these political hoodlums from executing election banditry to select their political gladiators. Traditional elders who are so revered and respected are insulted, jeered and maimed; clergies are not spared either. Thugs, in some cases assisted by the police and secret service, terrorize innocent Nigerians who naturally came to discharge their civil duties. A case in point is the gubernatorial election held on the 14<sup>th</sup> July 2018 in Ekiti State, Federal Republic of Nigeria. Very ludicrously, the All Progressive Alliance party (APC) led government deployed 35,000 armed policemen, 5,000 officers and many unspecified numbers of Civil Defence Corp and Secret Service respectively for the election.

Of course, the result was obvious, that is the election was shambolically rigged in favour of the ruling party. More stultifying was that the Independent Electoral Commission (electoral body in Nigeria) were complicit to the extent that there existed a variance glaringly on the accredited voters and the real votes cast (votes cast exceeded the accredited voters). The recent State House of Assembly bye-elections held on the 18<sup>th</sup> August 2018 in Rivers State, Nigeria, witnessed such violence that the entire result was cancelled. Thugs under the directives of both parties (APC and PDP) invaded all the

polling units, carted away electoral materials (card readers, ballot boxes and other essentials necessary for the election) in the full glare of the security operatives which in this situation are complicit. The security apparatus as usual inclined to the government of the day, shot sporadically and intimidated members of the opposition to the central government, all in the attempt to leverage the ruling party, in this case All Progressive Alliance (APC), to win the election(s).

The intensity in electoral violence in Nigeria is so fierce and annihilatory to the extent that no one and property is spared, in order to achieve this rather inglorious victory. The press (media) either suffers and the ruling party refuses at this instance to accept the maxim that, "when free speech is respected, opinions are bound to differ". In these three years of Mr. Muhammadu Buhari APC-led government, he has become pretty intolerant of any form of opposition or critical opinion. Press reporters and their editors received the butt of this government's furry, as they are relentlessly harassed for publishing any material remotely critical of the administration (The Premium Times journalist was arrested, slammed for two years without trial).

A typical Nigerian politician on an election day is brutal, aggressive and adversarial. For them, thuggery is a norm, beating opponents with sticks, machet, shooting etc. is what makes them "good politicians". More laughable but serious is the fact that police copiously and subserviently aid and abate this notoriety orchestrated by politicians. Vote buying and very unscrupulous dealings of politicians on election day is heralded and welcomed – and the police superintending the payment for those whose votes have been bought. The party involved would approach a prospective voter and negotiate the terms in respect to how much he/she will be paid, ranging from N5,000 (\$11 USD to N10,000 \$22USD). In connivance with the electoral officers in the polling unit, the party's agent is allowed the liberty to see how each electorate casts his/her votes. And if you vote for them, at the spot the money will be given to you by a policeman/party representative. This is done to exonerate criminal liability of the candidate in case the person dispensing the money is caught (which is practically impossible).

Nigeria has 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Here are classical cases of how elections took place in some of these states.

### 1.3. Cross River State

Interestingly, this state happens to be the researcher's home state, made up of 18 local government areas and segmented into 3 Senatorial Districts. It has had its fair share of unfocused, unpatriotic, highly unimaginative and purposeless politicians. As with most other states, the predominant parties (People's Democratic Party [PDP] and Alliance Progressive Congress [APC]) are the ruling parties. Politics here just like in every other state, is seen as a "do-or-die affair", such that the players maim, kill and destroy to win election. All antics, methods and measures are employed to achieve this singular purpose.

In all fronts, politicians irrespective of political parties, divide, usurp this incontrovertible fact, i.e. rain violence to win election where they have relative advantage. People's Democratic Party as it were before now (1999 – 2015) has been the ruling party and only recently upstaged by the All Progressive Congress (APC), maintained the status-quo ante and as argued by Ayuk (2018), used the same methods (rigging, ballot stashing, vote buying, security complicity, killing, announcement of fake results, etc.) to do their biddings. A case in point was the one that occurred in 2008; a council election in a local government area (Etung). The opposition and the flag bearer of ANPC named POLAMSY (not real name) was the people's choice, with a lot of broad-based support. He was brutally beaten by the thugs and security operatives supporting the ruling party (PDP) then. His school (private secondary) was totally razed and his family pursued out of the state. His supporters met the same fate as some were matchetted and given undignified treatment.

The above assertion authenticates Kuka's (2007) view that Nigerian politicians spell failure in economic, social and moral stance and have no discipline, vision and commitment to transforming from dungeon of decay. In all facets, according to World Bank Reports as stated in Kukah (2007), the coefficient indices for any modicum of development remains abysmal, life expectancy is in the decline, poverty rages on, death, despair and destruction at the instant hurts Nigerians. This behaviour of political absurdity is reflected in all the states of the federation, predicating its moralization on the local maxim which says "carry go" meaning no opposition; and if there is, we are above the law. In all, a winner is sworn in and several times the judiciary is compromised to justify this travesty called election.

"To accentuate the position of the judiciary's corruption in election matters, General (Barr.) Oladipo Diya (Rtd.) affirmed that, judges go to court with two judgments and serve the interest of the "paymasters – the highest bidder". Policemen are the biggest threat to democracy in Nigeria – that the situation has degenerated to open robbery with the police leading or heading the respective squads of scoundrels to rig election for politicians who have handsomely paid them (Ayuk, 2015).

In Anambra and Akwa Ibom State (Nigeria), the story is not different. The researcher participated in elections there as a Local Government Collation Officer and experienced firsthand election fraud during election day. In Anambra State, while the election and collation were going on, agents of respective parties (All Progressive Grand Alliance, People's Democracy Party and All Progressive Congress) embarked on intensive haggling of price to prospective voters who are ready to sell their votes. Of course, many voters succumbed owing primarily to poverty and joblessness, which affirms the assertion made by a discussant in a focus group discussion session that:

How can credible election be possible, where majority of Nigerians remain idle and hopeless. Let's tell ourselves the truth and stop all these deceits. The truth is, if somebody has something meaningful to do, why would he or she collect paltry sums of money or handouts to mortgage his or her future. That after this you will not see these politicians again and even change their phone numbers, so let me collect what I can because this is the only time, I see them.

In this case, All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) is the government in the saddle and used this relative advantage (state apparatus) to out-rig other parties and subsequent victory.

In Akwa Ibom State, in the Bye-elections conducted for a Senatorial Seat, agents of both PDP and APC were buying votes for their respective contestants – as it were, the PDP in this case bought more and won the election. Some of the officials of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) were found to be part of this shameful act and some who were unlucky were summarily dismissed but never sent to jail.

In Ekiti State, in the western region of Nigeria, the desperation of politicians to win got to the crescendo. The ruling APC government, unabashed, flagrantly with the help of the security agencies rigged the election. The incumbent governor, Ayodele Fayose, was physically assaulted, tear-gassed, manhandled, beaten and was taken to the hospital, while his office was barricaded by the police which according to them, they are taking orders from above.

These few cases are reflective scenario of how elections are conducted in the states of Nigeria. In the words of Kukah (2007),

The average Nigerian politician does not seem to know how to spell failure as far as the contest for office is concerned. Those who lose elections blame first their opponents, then state government, the electoral commission and the security agencies, the polling booth, the date, day and time of the elections, the weather or the heavens (too much rain or sunshine) etc..... In an environment saturated with suspicion such as ours, where Nigerians have a tendency to resort to the “native ways”, when the going gets really tough and conventional means fail, your fortune or misfortune in any venture could be hinged on a seemingly innocuous event such as time of the day when you act, gender or physical state of the first person sighted in the day (a blind or lame woman or man), a snake crossing your path from left to right, etc. As such, the political space is sometimes a pantheon inhabited by “deities” of various shapes, sizes, pervasions or tongues.

## 2. Methodology

Since elections in Nigeria are rapacious and more profligate in the lens of ordinary Nigerians, it is proper then to adopt a survey method embedded with purposive sampling technique to authenticate or otherwise the assertions canvassed by this study. This in the thinking of the researcher will be more qualitative and probing to balance the discourse.

### 2.1. Excerpts of the Methods (Focus Group Discussion and Interview)

Here are the verbatim responses of interviewees and focus group discussants on the following questions put forward:

Who is a Nigerian politician?

Response: Mr. Sylvanus Okon in Calabar South, Cross River State, Nigeria, asserts thus:

They are thieves, killers, rapacious, liars with no emotions, no sacrifice, greedy – only for themselves and their families. They do not care if you exist – their only concern is to rig election and occupy positions in government to steal our money and squander our resources, build houses in America, United Kingdom, Canada, Dubai; send their children to school abroad. You can even see President Buhari’s unending medical check-ups abroad (London) and his family when they are sick. It is a shame.

Another interviewee, a 30 years old man, Ugouchi, adds:

Nigerian politicians are shameless, unimaginative and incoherent set of humans on planet earth; very unkind, vitriolic, vicious, malicious and unaffable. They are devil’s agents so long as I am concerned. They come and deceive us every year with insulting gifts (salt, onion, old clothes, etc.). they are legalised criminals using tax payers’ money. It is quite unfortunate for Nigeria.

The story is the same for Mr. Raymond Ekpi, who registered his displeasure about politics and politicians in Nigeria, as thus:

Sir, look at me, I graduated six years ago, yet all attempts to secure a job is nullity. This is because I do not have a political godfather and none of my uncles is a politician. This is unfair, it is injustice. But these politicians’ children and family members readily get jobs and some choose where they prefer. Just look at what is happening in APC Buhari-led Federal Government. His daughter (21 years) who just graduated barely a month has been made a board member of Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) with a monthly salary of N2million (approximately US\$5,550). This is who a typical politician is in Nigeria.

The above findings reinforce this research claims about untidy and prebendal and self-serving politics that is not predicated on service and welfare of the people.

The second question put to them was: Do your votes count in an election?

The responses did not surprise the researcher because it goes to confirm what the research aimed to validate.

For example, Mr. ‘A’ (not real name for security reasons) expressed his disillusionment as:

Are you a stranger in this country? Are you not seeing the nonsense going on in this APC led government? They preached change, transparency, accountability, justice and equity. All are “film tricks”. Election malpractices with this government is something Nigerians have not witnessed before. It is so bad that I supported this government, which incidentally I am an appointee. That is why I say don’t mention my name. Impunity is unprecedented, looting in the guise of fighting corruption, arbitrariness – oh my God, we are finished in this country. We manipulate any election that is of interest to us through the electoral body with the help of security outfits.

I interjected, “If you feel so bad, why not resign your appointment?”

His further response was:

I am observing "table manners" ... If I resign now, how do I survive? After all there are several others jostling for this position who would even render their services of thuggery to win election for these politicians. That is the situation. Let me gather what I can for me and my family while it lasts. Contemplating otherwise is a big "NO" for me even though I know for sure what we are doing is wrong.

Statements like this preponderantly cut across all the interviewees and group discussants, so repeating same views to me is overstating the obvious.

The research aligns with the postulations of Kuka (2007), who maintained that "Nigerian politicians have no time for the thought that being a gallant loser or magnanimous victor are bricks for the foundation on which democracy is built. Politicians can only take responsibility for winning, but not for losing. Losing an election for them is the handiwork of extra-terrestrial species or their agents employed on earth by the enemy – that is why the common expression of contestants who lose in any election is, "I was rigged out; the enemies have done their worst". Though, the above observations are not meant to be final judgement of the electoral conduct of Nigerian politics per se.

## 2.2. Correlating Indices of Electoral Fraud in Nigeria

The fissisiparous nature and elements of politics in Nigeria have led to many correlates adduced to have been responsible for the rather "dirty politics" played in Nigeria. These factors, for me, are inexhaustible and to chronicle them one after the other in general context, may tend in some sort, obscure the trajectory of this discourse which ultimately will ensue ideological disputation as to what really is or are the causes of electoral fraud. But the fact remains incontestable that there is/are systemic electoral crimes informed by the following factors, especially elicited, and uniquely so, from this study. They are:

**Poverty:** Recently, the Brooklyn Institute announced that Nigeria is the world poverty capital, overtaking India. It is a fact that more than 70% of Nigerians live below US\$ 1 a day, in severe cases a week, which speaks volumes of how poverty has so ravaged the citizenry. When people are poor, they become gullible and can easily be manipulated to embark on any enterprise so long as the money is there, however inconsequential that money is. From the field study, many who indulged or were used by politicians to commit electoral frauds, do so because cash is involved. Hence, they become readily available as instruments in the hands of politicians to stash ballot boxes, rig, steal, buy and sell votes as the case may be, principally at the biddings of the politicians.

**Weak institutions and culture of impunity:** This, fundamentally, is being responsible to and for electoral related crime. The courts and the police seem overtly or covertly to have encouraged fraud in elections. A situation where the police assist thugs of politicians to thumbprint ballot papers and snatch ballot boxes to favour a particular candidate does not in any shred of imagination construe a free and fair election. Nobody is arrested; even when the people committing these acts/crimes are known, seen and even captured, the courts free them with flimsy excuses or judgment. So, when nobody is punished for crime, there is that tendency the crime will be routinely committed.

**Inordinate quest for wealth, riches and power** according to this study propels electoral crime. Most politicians have no simple service plan for their constituents. Put differently, their sole purpose of seeking elective office is to gain power, steal and loot the national treasury. They are not innovative, as always, only a few that are pro-Nigerians, who desire for their constituents as paramount, and are service disposed. But for the majority, their penchant for stupendous acquisition of illegal wealth is really unprecedented. They are so corrupt that they have lost the right to be addressed as "honourable" and "distinguished" senators/members. Nigerian citizens because of the actions against them, the country and its inhabitants look helplessly, pathetically and resignedly (Olufemi, 2009).

**Ethnicity and tribalism** to a large extent has caused so much dis-service to the growth and development of democracy and the entire electioneering process. Elections and electing persons into offices in Nigeria is greatly tilted to tribal sentiments, such that merit is dispensed of, while mediocrity is heralded and celebrated. The argument has always been "na our person", meaning, this is our candidate so we are going to vote him/her whether he/she has the qualification or the pedigree required of the office. When the "unfit" are preferred to: fit in both elective and appointive positions, the result is always clear and catastrophic. Issues of ethnicity regarding to elections is very emotive, even blood can be spilled, wars can be waged all in the attempt to elect (by all means) one's tribal person to a political office.

## 3. Conclusion

From the analysis of the political narrative in Nigeria, it is clear that politics in Nigeria is a "means to an end". It is evident that poverty, weak institutions which often form and occupy our politicking, combined with tribalism/ethnicity, galvanized by the so-called elite, vis-à-vis impunity, constitute the bane of politics/democracy. Hence the study recommends as follows:

- Electoral offenders should be severely punished so as to serve as a deterrent to others
- Our institutions should be strengthened just like in developed climes (USA, UK, Germany, etc.) to squarely address issues relating to election malpractice.
- Monetised politics should be discouraged and culprits punished accordingly.
- Political education by the electoral body (Independent National Electoral Commission) should be intensified so that electorates should be aware of the danger of voting under the influence of money, tribal and ethnic appeals

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#### Appendix

##### *Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Guide for Unsavory Nigeria Politics and Politicians*

Name of the Moderator: Research Assistant

Name of the Note Taker: Research Assistant

Location (Venue): Calabar

Date: 5<sup>th</sup> September, 2018

Note: Participants consisted of two groups of discussants of 17 (34). The group in its composition had 20 men and 14 women. Venue was Centre for Continuous Education Hall, University of Calabar. There were 8 moderators and note takers. Discussion will end after 15 minutes

Moderator welcomes the participants and explained the essence of the exercise (FGD), then read the consent form and request for their consents.

##### *Topic Guides*

Unique Politics and Nigeria politicians

- Who is a Nigerian politician?
- How do they operate in terms of campaign?
- Do they buy votes?
- Politicians do not rig election
- Can they kill for the purpose(s) of elections?