



Research Article

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Assessing the Effect of Federal Universities Academics and National Youth Service Corps Members on the Conduct of General Elections in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined issues that necessitated the use of federal universities academics and national youth service corps members in the conduct of general elections in Nigeria and discussed the credibility of election management with their involvement. It also interrogated the effectiveness and challenges of using them by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The study utilised primary data that was collected through semi-structured interviews with thirty respondents. Secondary data was sourced from periodicals, journals, election manuals, and electoral act of 2010 as amended. The data collected were analysed using content analysis. The study showed that the need to sanitize the electoral system informed the use of universities academics and national youth service corps members. The study also showed that the academics and national youth service corps members have facilitated the credibility of the electoral system and that the activities of desperate politicians who are driven by the lust for political power are some of the challenges faced in using university academics and national youth service corps members. It is suggested that the current use of universities academics and national youth service corps members in the conduct of future elections should be sustained.

Keywords: universities academics, national youth service corps members, ad-hoc staff, general elections, electoral reforms, electoral management

1. Introduction

Election management is fundamental to the sustenance of democratic stability. To have credible election largely lies in the neutrality of ad-hoc staff saddled with the management of elections at polls. According to Jega (2014), in the past, elections have been poorly managed because of the manner the ad-hoc-staff were recruited. In an attempt to ensure Nigeria's electoral sanity, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) moved away from the old practice of handpicking ad-hoc staff whose identity are not known and perhaps have political interest. The new option was introduced by INEC to eradicate some pre-election, election and post-election challenges.

Until the conduct of 2011 general elections, earliest ones were characterized by irregularities at different stages of voting and collation. For example, the general election of 1964 generated upheavals in the western region which led to another one in 1965 (Albert and Ajayi, 2007). In all of these, ad-hoc

staff manipulated election results with political parties and politicians (Duru, 2002). The general election of 1979 was also rigged; thereby giving rise to the enthronement of unpopular candidate (Festus Iyayi, 2004). According to Chimaroke Mgba (2017), the 1999, 2003, and 2007 general elections were also alleged to have been manipulated by ad-hoc staff at different stages of collation (Adetola, 2016). The 2011 general election was better managed under Professor Attahiru Jega, following his appointment, in 2010, as the chairman of INEC up to 2015. Several reforms such as the overhaul of the electoral register, modified open-secret balloting, improved transportation of electoral materials and personnel, and recruitment of different ad-hoc staff were initiated. In the long-run, these reforms contributed to the country's election improvement (Omotola, 2017). According to Jamien Hitchen (2015), the commission was able to organize peaceful elections in 2015, which more or less, for the first time; in the history of Nigeria, saw an opposition candidate defeating the incumbent president and the latter openly accepting its outcome. Affirming the potency of having a non-political ad-hoc staff, Jega (2015) acknowledges that it is the only antidote to have open and transparent elections that their outcomes would be acceptable to good number of stakeholders.

It is a huge challenge to get best of hands in term of human workforce to handle general elections in Nigeria (Jega, 2015). No wonder why electoral integrity is often undermined by human error (James, 2014). Politicians have severally smuggled their preferred candidates into the country's electoral body as ad-hoc staffs. In the past, ad-hoc staffs have severally compromised the process by doing the wish of politicians who smuggled them into the electoral body. Ad-hoc staffs with hidden political biases for candidates or political parties have rigged their political sponsors into power. Thus, Professor Attahiru Jega shifted the recruitment of INEC ad-hoc staff from "unknown" members of the public to the use of federal universities academics and national youth service corps members. Before the appointment of Professor Attahiru Jega in 2010, the practice was to recruit temporary staff of INEC from members of the public whose 'identity' is hidden. Such ad-hoc staffs are difficult to be held accountable for irregularities perpetrated by them then. Incumbent political office holders equally influence the selection of ad-hoc staff that sometimes compromised the integrity of the electoral process. However, INEC shifted the recruitment of its ad-hoc staff to national youth service corps members (returning officers) and academic staff from federal universities (presiding officers and poll clerks). With the new option, there is a growing improvement capable of deepening the electoral process, although not without its challenges. This study interrogates these issues.

2. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to:

- i. examine the issues that led to the use of federal universities academics and national youth service corps members as ad-hoc staffs in the management of general elections in Nigeria;
- ii. discuss the credibility of election management with the use of universities academics and national youth service corps members in the study area;
- iii. ascertain the effectiveness of the use of universities academics and national youth service corps members on election management; and
- iv. examine the challenges that face the use of universities academics and national youth service corps members by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

3. Methodology

This study is a descriptive one and employed both primary and secondary data. The primary data was gathered through in-depth interviews with thirty (30) purposively selected respondents, chosen based on their experiences and expertise on the subject matter. They were two senior INEC officials from its headquarters, Abuja; two senior officers from the Nigerian Police headquarters, Abuja; three officials of civil society organisations in Abuja (one each from YIAGA Africa, Centre for Democracy and Development, and Transition Monitoring Group); six academic members (two each from National

Democratic Institute, Abuja; Electoral Institutes, Abuja; University of Ibadan and University of Lagos, and two ex-corps members; and three officials of political parties from their headquarters in Abuja (one each from All Progressives Congress, Peoples Democratic Party and Social Democratic Party); four members of the National Assembly (two each from Senate Committee on electoral matters and two each from House of Representatives Committee on electoral matters); eight informed electorates with long history of voting from selected wards in Southwest. The in-depth interview was chosen to allow for flexibility, in-depth probe of the respondents and ensure that relatively similar questions were asked. Secondary data was sourced from newspapers, textbooks, magazines, journals, election manuals, and electoral act of 2010 as amended. Both primary and secondary data were content analyzed.

4. Theoretical Framework

Structural functional and institutional theories are the two theoretical frameworks used for this study. According to Macionis (1987), structural functional theory has a lot in common with regard to the survival of a political system. The structural-functional theory believes that every political system has certain structures or institutions which perform essential functions without which the system cannot survive. The search then is for these functions and structures that perform them. It is contended that we need to understand the structure and the functions before the political system can be appreciated. They also maintained that these institutions, to be adequately understood, must be situated in an expressive and active context. The theory showed that there are various functions which are present in every political system, and are seven in number. These seven functions are categorized into two, the input functions and the outputs functions. There are four functions under the inputs functions. They are interest articulation, interest aggregation, political recruitment, and political socialization. On the outputs functions, there are three functions which comprised of rule-making, rule application and rule adjudication. All these functions are carried out by institutions (structures) within a political system. These units are not limited to branches of government such as the executive, legislative and judiciary; rather, they include political parties and interest groups. One major criticism of this theory is that human beings are seen as dummies, acting as their role requires. However, in spite of this criticism, this theory is adequate in that, INEC is seen an institution of government with mandates to manage the electoral process of the country and needs to take certain decisions to meet up on its mandates. Thus, the option of using federal universities academics and national youth service corps members as ad-hoc staffs is within the roles of INEC as a structure to sanitise the electoral process.

The second framework is institutional theory. According to Raynard, Johnson and Greenwood (2015), institutional theory is based on an alternative set of assumptions that center on the concept of social construction. This approach concentrates on the impact of political institutions such as legislature, executive, judiciary as shaping political behavior. It is one of the prominent theoretical frameworks in the study of organizational structure and processes. This theory assert that the environment of an organization have strong influence on the development of formal structures (David and Bitektine 2009). This theory offers explanation as to how and why change occur in an organization as well as reasons for the entrenchment of new practices in an organisation. Thus, the reason why INEC as an institution embarked on the introduction of federal universities academics and national youth service corps members as ad-hoc staff against its old practice is to ensure the sanctity and integrity of the elections to be conducted in Nigeria.

5. Concepts of Elections, Electoral Reforms and Election Management

Democratic societies are founded on the principle of elections. Election is central to democratization. It is a fact that election is the life wire of any democracy. Elections are very important because they are means through which political expressions of the people are shown. The electorates have the right

to decide who rules them through credible, free and fair elections. Free and fair elections are essential for the peaceful transfer of power. This is why election empowered ordinary citizens by allowing them to influence the future policies of their government. Thus Linberge (2003) states that, "every modern representative democracy entails the notion of elections as the primary means of selecting political decision makers. Underlining the centrality of elections to representative democracy, Animashaun (2010) opines that election represents the life blood of modern democracy. If election is free and fair, it suggests that democracy is consolidating, and if on the other hand is corrupt, it shows that democracy is stagnant.

Elections are meant to meet certain ends. Firstly, election fulfills political recruitment purpose. It also influences the formation of government. Election also provides for representation. It is on the principle of election that representatives in government are elected. Through competitive election, demands are channeled from the public to the government. Also, through the instrumentality of election, governmental policies are influenced. Voters also gain valuable education through the instrument of election. The process of campaigning provides the electorate with information, about parties' candidates, policies, manifestoes, the records of government and the political system, which enhances opinion formation on the long run. Election confers government with legitimacy and finally serves as means through which elite can manipulate and control the masses.

Electoral reform, according to Leyenaar and Hazan (2011), is 'a change in the legislation that regulates the process of voting'. It equally refers to acts that are meant to improve the quality of the administration, conduct and management of electioneering processes prior to, during and after elections (Basiru and Adesina, 2019). In the view of Yusuf and Zengeni (2018), electoral reform focuses on the electoral body and the laws governing its operation. Election reform becomes important as a result of growing concerns bothering on controversial elections. In Nigeria, various committees have been set-up starting from the Constitution Drafting Committee of 1975; The Judicial Commission of Inquiry into the affairs of the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) in 1979-1983/1984; The Political Bureau in 1986; The Constitution Review Committee in 1987; and The Constitutional Conference in 1995 (Onapajo, 2015). However, in the present fourth republic, another committee was also constituted by the late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua administration in 2007 (Onapajo, 2015). Abah and Nwoku (2017) noted that the former president admitted that the challenges of the elections are a nagging one in the country, and it has been generating a problem including that of 2007 which produced him.

In a bid to improve the quality of elections in Nigeria, the late president Yar'Adua inaugurated Election Reform Committee (ERC) chaired by Justice Mohammed Lawal Uwais on the 28th August, 2007 (Onapajo, 2015). The committee was to probe into the problems of elections in Nigeria and come up with recommendations to improve them. The findings pinpointed the problems of electioneering process from two perspectives: the weakness of the electoral institution and the flaw of electoral regulation documents. Onapajo (2015) notes that the ERC identified the following as the causative factors for the appalling state of elections in Nigeria: the disposition of the Nigerian political elite, weak democratic institutions, negative political culture, weak constitutional and legal framework, and over-dependence of the EMB on the executive government and lack of capacity. Furthermore, the recommendations of the ERC led to chains of events that led the National Assembly to prioritise the amendment of the extant electoral reforms in the Nigerian constitution.

Election management according to Jinadu (1997) is the organization and conduct of elections to elective (political) public office by an electoral body. In the view of Oyekanmi (2015), election management is the systematic and electoral process of optimum uses of men and materials for the conduct of free, fair and acceptable election. Election management is a legal binding activity that requires standard in term of credibility. It could either have high level of credibility or lack credibility. All the processes surrounding the conduct of election determine its efficiency and effectiveness. Lack of credibility of election can propel loss of confidence by diminishing public confidence in such election results. Thus, according to Kerevei (2009), citizens may question the validity of election results that are perceived to lack of professionalism in management. According to him, lack of

confidence, which result from lack of credibility, could result to poor or low electoral participation. But, when the management of election is enriched with credibility, the confidence of citizens and politicians in its outcome would receive a boost and increase in electoral participation and the acceptability of election outcome by both the looser and winners. Therefore election management becomes very important in a democratic system of government because it is the quality of election that determines its acceptability.

Following the independence of the Nigerian state from the colonialist, the first republic was launched. The only notable election in the first republic was in 1964/1965, which was largely controversial and ridden with violence owing to the ethnic orientations of the Nigerian political parties. The high rate of political instability as a result of the electoral violence and the spate of corruption culminated into the untimely disruption of the democratic process in Nigeria through a bloody coup de' tat staged on January 15th, 1966. This coup ushered in the era of the military men in the Nigeria politics. It is noteworthy to point out that the electoral management body was changed from the Electoral Commission of Nigeria to Federal Electoral Commission by the Republican constitution of 1963 (Diamond, 1988). The effort of Murtala/Obasanjo led military administration is laudable for reinstating democracy for the second time and ushering in the second republic. The administration through the promulgation of the 1979 constitution made provision for the replacement of the erstwhile parliamentary system which Nigeria had inherited from her colonial masters to the American presidential system of government. Hence, the first presidential election was held in 1979 with a repeat of the process in 1983. There were visible incidences of massive election rigging associated with the second republic.

The third republic was short-lived as it ended abruptly with the annulment of the June 12, 1993 elections by Gen. Ibrahim Babangida who came into power through a palace coup that toppled the Buhari/Idiagbon military administration. The 1989 republican constitution was promulgated which contained the rudiments for the 1993 election. Part of the provision of the constitution was the renaming and reorganization of Federal Electoral Commission to National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON). The 1999 election was anchored on the provision of the 1999 constitution which was spearheaded by General Abubakar Abdusalam. The constitution also rechristened the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). According to Osinachukwu and Jawan (2011), the election was largely maneuvered to favour Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. The prevalent political apathy in the country precipitated the people's poor turnout in the election. But, despite all the shortcomings, the election was peaceful (Obiyan and Olutola, 2013). In assessing the performance of INEC in the election, both national and international observers registered their displeasure with the outcome of the election and the role played by INEC. Buttressing this point, Aluko (1999) notes that there was a wide disparity between the number of voters accredited at polling stations and the final results announced from several states.

The 2003 election was to continue the process of democratic consolidation in the nation. One outstanding thing about it was that it was the first peaceful civilian transition of power. The election was also managed by INEC under the leadership of Dr. Abel Guobadia but was widely criticized for its myriads of irregularities. In evaluating the role of INEC in the election, Ogunsanwo (2003) averred that INEC was certainly not in control of activities of the election. Also, the European Union Observation Mission according to Momah (2016) noted that the management of the election by INEC was not good enough due to technical, organizational and structural shortcomings.

The 2007 election was no different from 2003 as it was marred with various kinds of electoral irregularities. The 2007 general ushered in the political administration of Umar Musa Yar'adua. The election was conducted by INEC under the leadership of Professor Maurice Iwu. According to the United Kingdom Aid (2007), the 2007 election was the worst in the history of Nigeria due to high level of electoral rigging, thuggery, ballot box snatching, multiple voting and other forms of manipulations. The report of the EU Observation Mission on the 2007 elections pointed out that the 'elections at states and federal levels were marred by very poor organisation, lack of transparency occasioned by procedural irregularities, substantial evidence of fraud, widespread voters

disenfranchisement at different stages of the process, lack of equal conditions for political parties and candidates, and numerous incidence of violence.

The 2011 election was the beginning of improved electioneering in Nigeria followed by the 2015. Supporting this view, Jega (2015) asserted that they represented a turning point away from badly conducted elections in Nigerian. However, the supposed changes from 2011 can be adduced to the implementation of the 2010 electoral reform which was initiated by the Yar'adua led administration and implemented by Dr. Goodluck Jonathan administration. This is not to say that elections from 2011 are free from imperfections. There were incidences of under aged voting, voters' inducement and ballot stuffing. In fact, there were incidences of violence after the election especially in the Northern part of the country (Premium Times, 2015). The 2019 election was in no way different from the 2011 and 2015 elections as it suffered from electoral irregularities too.

6. Data Presentation and Discussion

This chapter presents and discusses the data collected through in-depth interviews in line with the objectives set to guide this study.

6.1 *Issues that called for the use of federal universities academics and national youth service corps members as ad-hoc staffs in the management of general elections in Nigeria*

Several issues on elections revealed that the choice of federal universities academics and national youth service corps members became the only option for the conduct of elections in Nigeria. In examining the issues, several reasons were given by the respondents in this study. Approaching the issue from a historical perspective, an informed electorate, Mr Akanbi Omoloye¹ asserted that the choice of universities academics and national youth service corps members became inevitable because of several irregularities that characterized the 2007 general elections. According to him¹, the spate of rigging was aggravated to an appalling magnitude in the 2007 general elections. The 2007 general elections were reported to be so bad that even late President, Musa Yar'adua who was the product of the election openly acknowledged that the elections was mired with electoral irregularities. Also, Mr. Olusola Adeogun² noted thus:

We have always had issues with election in Nigeria. From 1999, elections in Nigeria have been characterized with irregularities. The 2007 election was worst of all and a complete sham. There was nothing the politicians did not do to make sure they win. Some of them colluded with polling officials to rig the elections. There was nothing INEC could use to stop the incidence of multiple voting, even, under-aged voting. There was nothing called accreditation. In fact, that election spearheaded by Prof. Maurice Iwu made a mockery of democracy in Nigeria.

Also, a senior lecturer³ supported that the need to revamp the Nigeria's electoral system informed the use of universities academics and national youth service corps members.. Consequently, the failure of INEC in curtailing electoral malpractices underscored the use of universities academics and national youth service corps members. He³ lamented thus:

The core mandate of INEC is to ensure that elections are conducted according to globally acceptable standards. They have the mandate to ensure the credibility and transparency of elections in Nigeria. Unfortunately, prior 2011, INEC was largely inefficient; inefficient in terms of recruitment of ad-hoc staff. That was the stage in Nigeria's electoral process when rigging was so massive that people started calling for reforms.

A principal officer⁴ at INEC made it known that the nation's electoral system was riddled with problem of rigging owing to INEC ineptitude. He⁴ noted that "the success of any election is to have unbiased umpire that would be seen as impartial. Most ad-hoc staff used to be biased. They danced to the tune of politicians". In the previous studies, Omotola (2017) and Agboluaje (2019) affirmed that many of the challenges confronting the electoral process of the country emanate from INEC administrative lapses. Going further, Venerable Stephen Ojewande⁵ clearly emphasized that reforms

are born out of electoral experience; that is, reforms are introduced or new innovations are adopted into the electoral system as a result of challenges faced in former elections. This assertion is in tandem with the report of National Democratic Institute on the 2011 elections. According to the report, the need to overhaul the electoral process owing from lessons of the past was a catalyst in introduction of new ad-hoc staff in the electoral administration of the country (NDI, 2012). This is with a view to prohibiting such challenges from reoccurring. Ojewande⁵ noted inter-alia;

...when we are talking about the conduct of election, it is much placed in the hands of ad-hoc staff, which are expected to be neutral. To get the set of neutral ad-hoc staff in the past was a herculean task until Professor Jega changed from the old method when he became INEC chairman.

Also, the recruitment of ad-hoc staff with integrity, in the opinion of a senior official⁶ of YIAGA Africa, accounted for the use of universities academics. He⁶ posited that, "the presiding, collation and many returning officers prior to the 2011 elections were largely unknown names. Explaining the rationale for changes in the people recruited as ad-hoc staff, he⁶ made it known that most previous ad-hoc staffs before the universities academics and national youth service corps members were engaged compromised the electoral process. Buttressing the above viewpoint, Mr Mohammed Umar⁷ submitted that the problem with our electoral system is simply our unrepentant politicians, who can do "anything" to get to power. A critical point is that scrupulous politicians in Nigeria frequently plan to circumvent the electoral process (Akubo, 2020).

In their views, Verje, Kwaja and Onubogu (2018) pointed out that ad hoc staffs were made use of to guarantee the credibility of the electoral system of Nigeria. Sharing his viewpoints, Mr Umar⁷ approached the discourse from the dimension of *ad hoc* staff that is also pivotal to the effective conduct of election in Nigeria. He⁷ affirmed that the need to guarantee electoral credibility informed the change in the recruitment of *ad hoc* staff from state civil servants and teachers to National Youth Service Corps members and the federal universities. He⁷ said:

We used to recruit primary and secondary school teachers, now there are insinuations that since they are part of the state and are being paid by the state, we should jettison that. Initially, we had the huge success with the use of NYSC corps members because they were young minds, they have innovation, they have patriotic intentions and the first use of corps members was without stress. We were able to bridge the gap of compromise. Not only them, we are now using civil servants from federal ministries, federal agencies and departments of government. And then, we are using lecturers, even workers from federal tertiary institutions. We also use students from federal tertiary institutions.

From another perspective, Honourable Aishat Duku⁸ noted that there are unscrupulous party loyalists, who can sacrifice election integrity, if they are lucky to be recruited as ad-hoc staff by INEC in error. An official of Transition Monitoring Group⁹ explained that the neutrality of officials saddled with the conduct of elections go a long way to its credibility. Summarily, the need to sanitize the electoral system and produce electoral outcomes that would be credible informed the decision. This can be adduced from the spate of electoral irregularities that characterized previous elections. Several challenges such as rigging, multiple voting, over declaration of results and deliberate under counting characterized the electoral process in previous elections by ad-hoc staff before universities academics and national youth service corps scheme members are being used. Hence, the need to have better hands that could be trusted with Nigeria's electoral conduct. Corroborating the above view point, Mgba (2017) asserted that elections from 1999 to 2007 were infested with electoral irregularities.

6.2 *The credibility of election management with the use of universities academics and national youth corps members*

This segment examines the credibility that the use of universities academics and national youth service corps members has brought on the management of elections in Nigeria. Most of the respondents ascertained that INEC's choice of the new set of ad-hoc staff has brightened the electoral hope in Nigeria. In his view, Ojewande¹⁰ affirmed thus:

The intention of the election umpire was to ensure that the people who are electoral officials are neutral people; and you can see that somebody from the north that is posted to the west as a corps member who is an electoral officer will be an unbiased person. Also, members of the academic community are known for their integrity. They are a set of people that are interested in repairing the already damaged electoral system in Nigeria.

From the above submission, the corps members are presumed to be neutral during election because they are posted to places where they share no emotional attachments. Also, senior members of the academic community who serve as collation officers or returning officers are seen as reputable individuals that are unlikely to compromise their integrity. The above position tallies with Verje, Kwaja and Onubogu (2018) that posited that young corps members will not want their future to be jeopardized on the account of compromising electoral integrity, while, the lecturers know that their employment can be terminated if found guilty of committing electoral infractions. Mr. Sayuti Adeniyi¹¹ equally noted that Nigeria electoral process has been better compared to previous ones where people that cannot be tracked were used as ad-hoc staff. The lecturers engaged in this noble cause can easily be traced to their respective place of work. They are, therefore, unlikely to compromise the process of election when in charge, so as not to tarnish their image. The universities academics and national youth service corps members appeared more neutral in the electoral process.

6.3 *The effectiveness of the use of universities academics and national youth corps members on election management in Nigeria*

The effectiveness of the universities and national youth service corps members as ad-hoc staff on election management still remains controversial. However, while most of the respondents agreed that it has brought significant improvement in election management in Nigeria, some are of the view that sanity is yet to be fully seen in terms of electoral conduct in the country. According to Mrs. Aderonke Mohammed¹², the use of the corps members and members of the academic community has enhanced the credibility of election management. In her¹² words:

We have not achieved a hundred percent implementation, but to a reasonable extent, we have implemented some. Take for example, the issue of the NYSC cadets; we can all see that they form the bulk of presiding officers, the assistant polling clerk.

Buttressing the above position, Mr. Innocent Ataba¹³ explained that the credibility of an electoral system is based on the trust that the electorate have in the electoral process. His¹³ words:

What most of the innovations try to do is to improve INEC's service delivery. To overcome the challenge of doubtful ad-hoc staff, INEC decided to use other types of personnel that the public can trust more.

It is clear that the respondents spoke in favour of INEC. Reacting, Honourable Olusegun Odebunmi¹⁴ remarked that INEC has achieved much. According to him¹⁷, the commission has earned the trust of some stakeholders. Thus, for him¹⁴, what this means is that INEC must not relent in its effort at institutionalizing credible elections in Nigeria.

In his contribution, a senior lecturer¹⁵ is of the opinion that what can further help INEC in attaining its goal of facilitating a viable election management is to adopt electronic voting. He¹⁵ pointed out that engaging technology to manage every aspect of the electoral process will go a long way in instituting viable elections in Nigeria. Specifically, he¹⁵ observed that:

We are improving but INEC needs to do more. There is need for improvement on the technology and improvement on voters' education. INEC can borrow from the idea of Kaduna State and make use of electronic voting machines. This will enhance their efficiency. With these machines, vote casting and vote counting can be done at the same time. Once the machines are deployed, INEC only needs to sensitize the people on how to operate them.

Moving along the same line, Mr. Ope Ajisegbede¹⁶ and Mr. Jelili Adejoro¹⁷ agreed that INEC is trying but needs to do more. They contended that it is the mandate of INEC to produce viable elections in Nigeria. Mrs. Echem Akare¹⁷ opined that some people might be of the opinion that INEC

has not done anything significant as far as election management is concerned. The position of Akare is in tandem with the submission of Omoleke (2018) who noted that the introduced reforms are impactful on the electoral integrity in Nigeria.

6.4 *Challenges facing the use of universities academics and national youth service corps members by the Independent National Electoral Commission*

On the challenges that INEC is facing in its use of universities academics and national youth service corps members as ad-hoc staff in Nigeria, most of the respondents agreed there is still deliberate sabotage of the electoral process by politicians. Dr. Adamu Tanko¹⁸ noted:

We only have one challenge which is the political will to drive these innovations into reality. It is sad to note that people within the corridor of power are the ones who do not want us to have sanity in our process because they want to remain in office forever. They know that if there is a level of sanity in the process, majority of them will not be reelected into offices.

From a contrary perspective, Umar¹⁹ noted that despite their effectiveness, there are challenges emanating from two perspectives. Speaking on the first one which dwelled largely on deliberate compromise of electoral standard, he¹⁹ affirmed that:

The major challenge is our politicians. Corps members are now being compromised by these politicians. There are instances when some of them do circumvent the use of card readers. Not that the card readers were not good but those that are managing them at times do fail the commission by deliberately not using the card readers. They deliberately circumvent the use of card readers because of connivance with scrupulous politicians

The second dimension to the challenge encountered by INEC from the use of corps members is computer illiteracy, inability to operate simple gadgets or read and understand simple things. Prince Olutimileyin David²⁰ chronicled the narration:

Most of the graduates from Nigerian universities are computer illiterates. This is an absurdity in this century; that a graduate do not know how to use computer, some of them cannot operate the smart card readers. Some of them cannot even read and understand what they are reading. For every personnel, the commission ensures that a manual is provided during period of training. For them to comprehend what is in the manual and follow the guideline is a problem. Some of them cannot even write their names correctly.

There is a deliberate compromise by some members of the academic community which is precipitated by greed. INEC Chairman Prof Mahmood Yakubu in a speech delivered at the Forum of Anti-corruption Situation Room, some politicians sometimes persuade willing ad-hoc staff to abandon the use of smart card readers (Punch, 2019). Professor Attahiru Jega, a former INEC chairman alleged that University lecturers formed an alliance with politicians to compromise the system (Ebhomele, 2019). Mrs. Divine Agbu²¹ summed it all that:

...the lecturers too pose a serious problem to the electoral process. We have experienced Professors not filling the forms correctly. They were painting our result forms. They are not aware that election is a different ball game entirely. Some of them do not follow guidelines. INEC is always at the receiving end because we have to manage the situation anytime this kind of mess is created.

Sharing the same opinion with Okoli (2016), Inspector Echobu Adole²² also consented that the effectiveness of the corps members and members of the academic community towards credible election management is worrisome. He²² averred:

I am not in support of using the corps members. In some remote areas, corps members will be on the road for more than two hours before they get to their various destinations for election while some areas are prone to violence. The corps members should not be used in those areas but be limited to very peaceful areas.

Mr. Isaac Olayode²³ agreed that desperate politicians frustrate INEC. To him²³, INEC is playing its role effectively but their effort is frustrated by the politicians that are against electoral sanity. He²³ posited that:

There are a lot of good policies in Nigeria but the problem is the will to put those white papers into reality. We must be willing to do the right thing at the right time. Our core challenge is the politicians. If only they can change and reduce their over ambition to win at all cost, there is no way democracy cannot be consolidated in Nigeria.

From another angle, Mrs. Ronke Ojerinde²⁴ asserted that the political culture of many Nigerians is the problem. She²⁵ explained that many Nigerians hate innovations. She²⁴ noted that politicians, who are used to the existing order, having mastered the political terrain and use same to their advantage, will stop at nothing to resist a new idea. This position conforms to the findings of Kambale (2011) that most Nigerians need to change from their bad political culture. Thus, majority of the respondents' opinions affirm that politicians are the principal problems confronting Nigeria's electoral system. This is captured by Tanko²⁵,

Until we have politicians with genuine interests of the people at heart, and the financial implication of participating in politics is reduced, we would continue to have problem in Nigeria's electoral process.

Another dimension which was introduced into the discourse by some of the respondents was the issue of deliberate sabotage. Mr. Ayoola Ismail²⁶ explained that some of the ad hoc-staff that are deliberately sabotage the process. In his contribution, Mr. Echo Edune²⁷ posited thus:

In connivance with politicians, some ad-hoc staffs, owing to financial considerations deliberately make sure that card readers are not used. This is with the aim of declaring the said election invalid to suit their political leanings. Some of them make use of manual voters register for accreditation which encourages over-voting.

From another perspective, Mr. Olaide Oladeji²⁸ revealed that INEC as an institution is not independent. According to him²⁸ INEC officials tend to dance to the tune of those who appoints them. Thus, any new system that intended to put their paymasters in disadvantage could be frustrated (Kambale 2011 and Akubo 2020). Ojerinde²⁹ also concurs with the position expressed by Olaide²⁸. This is in tandem with the opinion of Momah (2016) that the central challenges besetting viable electoral practice in Nigeria are the politicians.

7. Concluding Remarks

There is a significant influence with the current use of federal universities academics and national youth service corps members on election management in Nigeria. There are noticeable improvements in the conduct of elections with the current ad-hoc staff. The core challenge with the use of universities academics and national youth service corps members are some politicians that still do anything to sabotage the electoral process. The study recommends that the use of universities academics and national youth service corps members should be sustained and improved upon. Also, the remunerations of politicians which influence their desperation to win elections at all cost should be reduced to prevent those that are driven by economic gains from achieving their inordinate plans. There is a need for continuous sensitization of the electorate to support INEC's beautiful vision to place the process on the path of honour and integrity.

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