Factors Affecting Voting Behaviour in Nigeria Electoral System: Realities or Illusion?

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Abstract:

Election has become the most acceptable means of changing leadership in any given political system. There are elements that make electorates vote or not to vote in an election. These elements are different and dependent on the socio-cultural, economic, and political background of the nation and voters at one point or the other. In Nigeria, this is rampant, not necessarily because the electorates are apolitical, but the circumstances and the ways in which the context are fixed, forced them to accommodate other considerations. The study uses the existing literature, observation and opinion poll to gather data, and found that, it is the voting behaviours of the electorates that builds or mars the elections to produce credible or unacceptable candidates; Due to the voter"s poverty level, ethnicity and religious inclinations, voting pattern runs inline in order to satisfy those religious/ethnic interest and personal immediate economic needs. They accept gratification from politicians to vote for them even when they knew that such persons are not credible. The study recommends a total overhaul of the electoral system; education/creation of awareness to the Nigerian citizens, and to make the elective positions less lucrative and attractive than what is currently obtainable. In this way, those negative factors that influence the voting pattern in Nigeria can be controlled.

Introduction:

Since the world began and in all democratic nations, elections have become the most acceptable means of changing leadership in any given political system. History has shown that it is usually difficult to hold elections that are completely free and fair, (Yusuf, 2008:1). The

problem might be due to the socio-cultural issues operating in the environment at a given period of time. These issues are not limited to developing nations only but the developed and advanced nations of the world are also affected.

The elements that make people vote or not to vote in an elections are different and dependent on one's socio-cultural background. The nature of Nigerian states, for instance, with the attendant multi-ethnic nationalism and varied religious inclinations has even made the voting, elections and electoral system more problematic. The way and manner citizens vote and take electoral issues in Nigeria and some developing countries do not qualify it to be called elections, (Okocha, 2009).

There are a number of considerations a voter has in voting at any electoral issue. No matter how democratic the person might, there is always the impulse to vote for one out of the number contesting for such a position. Even the so called _parochial' think and make decisions before they cast their vote. They are always conscious of the importance of their votes in order to make an informed decision. There always has been some gruesome election battle in order to substantiate the considerations, (Dewa, 2009:2).

Concerning voting in general, it is pertinent to note that the heart of election is voting on the day of election by registered voters. Without voting, the term- election – is meaningless. Nnoli (2003:227-228), states:

> *The voting process raises a lot of issues that bother on the fairness and freeness of the elections. Most electoral malpractices occur during voting. They include impersonation, voting by unregistered persons, multiple voting, possession of unauthorized voters" cards, alteration of voters" cards, unlawful possession of ballot papers, unlawful possession of ballots boxes and disorderly behavior at polling stations, etc.*

It is the voting behaviours of the electorates that builds or mars the elections to produce credible or unacceptable candidates. In Nigeria, this is rampant not necessarily because the electorates are apolitical, but because the circumstances and the crude ways in which the context were fixed, forced them to consider other reasons.

It is our interest in this study to identify those factors that affect voting behaviour in Nigeria electoral system in order to determine whether those factors are realities or illusions as well recommend ways

of curbing them. The paper has the following sub-headings: Conceptual Clarification, Theoretical Framework, Factors Affecting Voting Behavior, The Impact of Ethnicity, Religion and Poverty/Economic factors in voting behaviours in Nigeria (Real or imagined?), Ways forward and Conclusion.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Voting Behaviour:

Voting behavior is derived from political behavior and Political behavior is not a new field in political science. Rather, it is a new approach to the study of political psychology. According to Anifowose (1999), political behavior refers to a particular approach, and set of methods for the study of human behavior in politics.

Voting behavior is the result of the total impact on voters by a number of forces operating in the society which the voters form a part. In voting behavior, we talk of why voters vote the way they do. No voter has ever voted without being influenced by one force or another. These forces include: personal identification of the individual voter with one of the political parties, candidates or major issues of the day and a sense of civic obligation to vote in conformity with the group interest, etc.

Electoral System:

A renowned political scientist, Nnoli (2003:230) defines electoral system –as a complex of rules and regulations that govern the selection of office holders in an organization‖. Electoral system, he continued,

> has an important effect not only on those who are recruited/elected into political offices but also may be significant in deciding the persons or political parties that can form a government….. Similarly, it affects the turnout of voters in an election, the kind and intensity of ideological preferences exhibited during the election, and the legitimacy of the resultant government.

Electoral System is seen as a method and rules of counting votes to determine the outcome of elections. Winners may be determined by a plurality, a majority (more than 50% of the vote), an extraordinary majority (a percentage of the vote greater than 50%), or unanimity, (**Encyclopædia Britannica, 2010**).

The choice of electoral system is one of the most important institutional decisions for any democracy. Electoral systems define and structure the rules of the political game; they help determine who is elected, how a campaign is done, the role of political parties, and most importantly, who governs. Furthermore, the choice of an electoral system can help to "engineer" specific outcomes, such as to encourage cooperation and accommodation in a divided society. Historically, however, it is rare for electoral systems to be chosen or carefully designed for the particular historical and social conditions of a country. In some cases, the choice has reflected the impact of colonialism and in others, the influence of neighbouring systems (IDEA, 2010)

Theoretical Considerations:

The Theory of Political Behaviour, is an aspect of political science, that attempts to quantify and explain the influences that define a person's political views, ideology, and levels of political participation. Theorists who have had an influence on this field include Karl Deutsch and Theodor Adorno. There are three main sources of influence that shape political orientation and create long-term effects. Generally, the primary influence originates from the family. Children will often adopt their parents' ideological values. Some theorists have argued that the family tends to be the strongest and most influential force which exists over the lifetime. One essay has credited the majority of the student activism of the 1930s to the influence of parents, (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/theoriesofpoliticalbehavior).

Peers also affect political orientation. Friends often, but not necessarily, have the advantage of being part of the same generation, which collectively develops a unique set of societal issues; Eric L. Bey has argued that "socialization is the process through which individuals acquire knowledge, habits, and value orientations that will be useful in future. The ability to relate on this common level is where the means to shape ideological growth lies‖ (Dey, (1997).

Finally, some political scientists have been interested in many studies designed to analyze the relation between the behavior of social groups and the political outcomes. Some of the social groups included in their studies have been age demographics, gender, religion and ethnic groups. For example, in U.S. politics, the effect of ethnic groups and gender has a great influence on the political outcomes.

In Nigeria, peoples voting pattern are influenced by their religion, ethnic lopsidedness or poverty/economic factors. In this principle, the choice to vote a particular person may be directed by ones

parent, ideological belief, religious belief, political feelings or hunger. It is well believed that the political behavior approach suits this paper as it tries to link us to the truth of why people vote the way they do. Even when the individual does not want to indulge in those behaviours as we have explained, the hunger, ethnic mafias and the religious leaders will coercively enforce him/her to do so.

Factors that Affect Voting Behavior:
There are many factors that could influence who a voter casts his vote for in an election. According to Akpakipan (2009), some of the factors are:
1. Level of one's education
2. Membership of Organizations
3. Sex
4. Religion
5. Tradition
6. Social Class
7. Ideological learning
8. Position on Ideological Divide
9. Party Image
10. Issues, Programmes and Policy Statements
11. Identification with Party
12. Candidate Orientation
13. The Principle of Embourgeoisement
14. Economic factor/Poverty
15. Promise of Political Patronage
16. Provision of Amenities
17. Force of Relationship
18. Location within the Geo-Politics
19. Ethnicity and language.

The unending list of factors, which influence peoples' voting behaviours in Nigeria electoral system, is outlined above. In this paper, we shall focus on –Ethnicity, Religion and Economic/ Poverty‖ as factors affecting voting behavior.

Ethnicity
Since the earliest times, ethnicity has been viewed in terms of a group setting associated with the idea of nationhood. Indeed, according to Peterson, Novak and Gleason (1982:1), the word –ethnic‖ is derived from the Greek word ethnos, which means nation or race.   Thompson

(2000:58) defines an ethnic group as ‒… a community of people who have the conviction that they have a common identity and common fate based on issues of origin, kingship, ties, traditions, cultural uniqueness, a shared history and possibly a shared language‖. Toland (1993:3) agrees with Thomson in her conception of an ethnic group, but takes it a step further by adding a sense of belonging on the individual level. According to him, ‒ethnicity is the sense of people-hood held by members of a group sharing a common culture and history within a society‖. These two views are shared by Diamond and Platter (1994: xvii), who regard ethnicity ‒…as a highly inclusive (and relatively large scale) group identity based on some notion of common origin, recruited primarily from kinship, and typically manifesting some measure of cultural distinctiveness. So conceived, ethnicity easily embraces groups differentiated by colour, language and religion; it covers ‗tribes', ‗races', ‗nationalities' and ‗castes''. An ethnic group according to Justice and Michaels (1998:230), is defined as an informal interest group whose members are different from members of other groups within the same society owing to the fact that they share compulsory institutions like kinship, religion, economic system and also have the capacity to freely communicate among themselves. The features of an ethnic group are: ‒A people with set biological and sociological traits, an identifiable subculture, conscious of being a people (brothers), conscious of their membership and often share the same language and religion…. Ethnicity is a ‒social phenomenon associated with interactions among members of different ethnic groups‖ (Nnoli, 1980:5). Ethnicity is behavorial in form and conflictual in content. ‒Ethnicity, focuses on sentiments of origin and decent, rather than the geographical considerations of a state‖, (Thomson, 2000:58).

The Impact of Ethnicity as a Factor in Voting Behavior in Nigeria:
Nigeria is located in West Africa and is, with about 140 million inhabitants, consisting of more than 300 linguistic groups. Nigeria is the most populous nation in the continent, (Kurfi, 1983:1). As a political entity, Nigeria was created in 1914 - a multi-ethnic nation consisting of the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and the Igbo, who comprise roughly 28%, 20% and 17% of the population respectively (Falola 1999:5). Although these groups interacted with one another before the colonial era, they were not primordially societies, and the artificiality of the British-drawn boundaries contributed to the ‗social construction' of

these ethnic groups, so much so that __ ...the creation of these _tribes'
is closely linked to the British colonial rule''(Thomsom 2000:66).

Each of these groups occupy's a distinct geographical region
that closely resembles the administrative boundaries of the colonial
period. The Northern region is dominated by the Hausa-Fulani, the
Western region dominated by the Yoruba, and Eastern region, mainly
populated by the Igbo, (Falola 1999:68; Thomson 2000:66). Given this
distinct regional administrative pattern, it was only natural that ethnic
groups would developed within, and identify with, these separate
regions, as this was a regional way to lobby the colonial authorities for
resources.

It is believed that ethnicity was not a vital factor in voting
behavior in Nigeria before the Richard's constitution of 1946. This was
the constitution that introduced regionalism into Nigerian politics
which is believed to have led to the emergence and development of
regional/ethnic politics in Nigeria (Obiajulu and Obi,2003:101).

There was emergence of political parties and unionism in the
country. The NCNC was formed in 1944 as a nationalist party without
any sectional interest. It was later regionised to East led by Dr. Azikiwe
However, the other two major parties, the Action Group and the
Northern Peoples Congress were formed from socio-political
organizations. The Action Group (A.G) was formed in 1948 as a
western regional political organization from Egbe Omo Oduduwa, a
Yoruba socio-cultural organization while the Northern Peoples
Congress (NPC) was formed in 1951 from the Jamiyyar Mutanen
Arewa.

These political parties started what seemed to be an ethnically
minded service. Each of them (AG and NPC) came from ethnic
background fronted by issues and ideas that only concerned them but
repugnant to others. For instance, when Chief Enahoro moved a motion
for independence in 1956, the Northerners refused to support this
motion, insisting that Nigeria was not ready for self rule yet. This was
because the Northerners did not have enough qualified people to take
up administrative positions in the North and they were also afraid of
Southern domination (East and West). Political and leadership tussle
started gripping the country. In Awolowo's opinion expressed in his
book The Path to Freedom for Nigeria it would be necessary for a
nationalist party in Nigeria to gain power in one region first before
expanding into the rest of Nigeria. The West in the NCNC soon aligned
themselves to AG. The cross-carpeting in the western house made Zik
to return to the East and asked Eyo Ita to resign. A statement was

attributed to Azikiwe that _'the God of Africa has created the Ibo nation to lead the children of Africa from the bondage of ages" (Ogunba, 1997:39). All these led to an atmosphere of distrust among the various ethnic groups and set the tone for the emergence of ethnic politics and ethnicity becoming a key factor in voting behavior in Nigeria up to the 1993 elections.

Paul R. Brass argues __… ethnicity and nationalism are not _givens', but are social and political constructions. They are the creations of elite, who draw upon, distort and sometimes fabricate materials from the cultures of the groups they wish to represent in order to protect their well-being or existence or to gain political and economic advantage for their groups as well as for themselves…"(Kruger 1993:11).

Ethnicity created bitter rivalry among the regions. Chief Eyo instigated the ACB crisis against Zik probably for being asked to resign to allow Zik form government in the East. The NCNC which was hitherto a nationalist party had to take its base in the East where its leader hailed from. The result of elections became ethnically influenced with the NCNC always winning in the East, the A.G in the West and NPC in the North. This is shown by the following election results:

Table 1. Political Affiliation of Members Elected in the 1954 Federal elections into the House of Representatives

Political Party/Independent	Eastern Region	Northern Region	Western Region	Lagos	Total
A.G	3	1	18		3
N.C.N.C	34	2	22		9
N.P.C	-	83	-		3
U.N.I.P	4	-	-		
N.C.L.P	-	-	1		
INDEPENDENT	1	-	-		
NO INFORMATION	-	6	1		

TOTAL	42	92	42		78

Source: Onu and Momoh, (2005:119) in Nworah, et al. (2007)

The political parties have their largest votes from their ethnic area as we can see from the above table during the 1954 elections in Nigeria.

Table 2. The Result of the 1959 Federal Elections into the House of Representatives

Political party/Independent	Eastern Region	Northern Region	Western Region	Lagos	Total
A.G	14	25	33	1	75
NCNC	58	-	21	2	81
NPC	-	134	-	-	134
NEPU	-	8	-	-	8
NDC	1	-	-	-	1
INDEPENDENT	-	7	8	-	15
TOTAL	73	174	62	3	312

Source: Onu and Momoh, (2005:119) and Nworah, et al. (2007).

This trend continued and reflected in the 1959 as we can see above. In 1979, one of the criteria used by FEDECO in the registration of political parties was __having membership in at least two-thirds of the states of the federation. The idea was to ensure that political parties that emerged this time were national in character'', (Onu and Momoh, 2005:123). In spite of this, the political parties that emerged were reincarnations of the old parties and essentially led by the same old politicians. The voting was still influenced by ethnicity with the East voting for NPP, West for UPN and the North for NPN. This is shown in the election results below:

Table 3. 1979 General Elections Results: Winning Parties by States.

S/N	STATE	HOUSE OF REPS	SENATE	STATE ASSEMBLY	STATE GOVERNOR
1	ANAMBRA	NPP	NPP	NPP	NPP
2	BAUCHI	NPN	NPN	NPN	NPN
3	BENDEL	UPN	UPN	UPN	UPN
4	BENUE	NPN	NPN	NPN	NPN
5	BORNO	GNPP	GNPP	GNPP	GNPP

6	CROSS RIVER	NPN	NPN	NPN	NPN
7	GONGOLA	GNPP	GNPP	GNPP	GNPP
8	IMO	NPP	NPN	NPN	NPN
9	KADUNA	NPN	PRP	PRP	NPN
10	KANO	PRP	NPN	NPN	NPN
11	KWARA	NPN	UPN	UPN	UPN
12	LAGOS	UPN	NPN	UPN	UPN
13	NIGER	NPN	NPN	NPN	NPN
14	OGUN	UPN	UPN	UPN	UPN
15	ONDO	UPN	UPN	UPN	UPN
16	PLATEAU	NPP	NPP	NPP	NPP
17	RIVERS	NPN	NPN	NPN	NPN
18	OYO	UPN	UPN	UPN	UPN
19	SOKOTO	NPN	NPN	NPN	NPN

Source: Onu and Momoh, (2005:124) and Nworah, et al (2007)

Campaigns became structured on ethnic lines rather than on issues and ideology. This is seen clearly in a statement in the Daily Star Newspaper of August 8, 1979 which reads, __The Yorubas are no fools to have voted for Awolowo. The Kanuris are no fools to have voted for Waziri. The Kano People are no fools to have voted for Aminu Kano. The Anambra and Imo states should be wise enough to vote en masse for Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe (Onu and Momoh,2003:126). In 1983, ethnicity was still a key factor. According to Uba (1989:72) quoted in Onu and Momoh (2005:126), the leaders of the major political parties were known to have made slips during the campaigns by calling their parties by the name of their former parties in the first republic. The election results show this clearly;

Table 4: 1983 General Election Results: Federal House of Representatives

STATE	NPN	UPN	NPP	PRP	TOTAL
ANAMBRA	15	-	14	-	29
BAUCHI	20	-	4	-	24
BENDEL	18	2	-	-	20
BENUE	15	4	-	-	19
BORNO	24	-	-	-	24
CROSS	26	2	-	-	28

RIVER					
GONGOLA	21	-	-	-	21
IMO	10	-	20	-	30
KADUNA	33	-	-	-	33
KANO	33	-	2	11	46
KWARA	9	5	-	-	14
LAGOS	-	12	-	-	12
NIGER	8	-	2	-	10
OGUN	-	12	-	-	12
ONDO	17	3	-	-	20
OYO	35	7	-	-	42
PLATEAU	10	-	6	-	16
RIVERS	14	-	-	-	14
SOKOTO	37	-	-	-	37
ABUJA	1	-	-	-	1
TOTAL	294	33	48	11	450

Source: Onu and Momoh, (2005:126) and Nworah, et al. (2007)

The above table speaks for itself. We must note that the issue before us have caused damages to political, economical and social development of the country. Still the struggle continues not bearing in mind the events of the past. Just about two weeks ago, the network news proclaimed that the Northern presidential aspirants in PDP have reach a consensus to get one candidate run for the PDP presidential primary. The quest to leadership at this point is not that the president is from another party, but that the president is not from the north. What an illusion.

Religious Factor:

At this point, we hear of Christian/Muslim or Muslim/Christian ticket. This is common where we have two positions running concurrently such as those of President and Vice President, Governor and Deputy Governor. Voting of candidate had always been considered on religious basis. Citizens vote candidates of the same religion more than others. This practice is evident in the leadership of the nation as narrated by Ayantayo, (2009) below:

1. Nnamdi Azikiwe/Tafawa Balewa (Christian/Muslim)   1960–1966
2. Shehu Shagari/Alex Ekwueme (Muslim/Christian)   1979–1983
3. Buhari/Idiagbon (Muslim/Muslim)   1983–1985
4. Babangida/Ebitu Ukiwe, Aikhomu (Muslim/Christian) 1985–1993
5. Shonekan/Abacha (Christian /Muslim)   1993–1997
6. Abacha /Diya, (Muslim/Christian)   1997–1998
7. Abubakar/Akhigbe (Muslim/Christian)   1998–1999

8. Obasanjo/Atiku (Christian / Muslim)   1999–2007
9. Yar'Adua/Jonathan (Muslim/Christian)   2007-2010
10.Jonathan/Sambo (Christian/Muslim)   2010-date

Right from the first republic till now, consideration on religious background of the contestant had been there. There is always the fear of fully implementing the Islamization law if Moslems are voted as president and vice-president. The first time Nigeria's name entered into the register of OIC (Organization of Islamic Countries) was during the Buhari/Idiagbon (Muslim/Muslim) 1983 – 1985 government. If not because of the vehement oppositions at that time, Nigeria would have had the full course of Islamic law operative in the country.

The Christians would want a the Christian voted while Muslims would want the Muslim voted. Religious preferences in the past presidential elections have not only shrouded the best Nigeria would have had, but also denied the country the opportunity of witnessing vibrant leadership that would have turned the turn the nation around for good, (Forster 2008). The conquest in the 21St century will only be possible if the country pursues objectivity rather than Prebendalism which has not produced any meaningful progress in any nation.

Religion has a strong history of influence over voting pattern. According to Verdenhalven, (2007), the vast majority of Catholics in Germany were located in the south and in the west, whereas the Protestant part of the population lived in the north and east of the country. The practice in this country is that of separatist, where each sect votes for people in their midst rather than the others even if they are better candidates. In our local areas, at periods of electioneering campaign, we hear this from Priests during church announcement that members should vote our own brothers/sisters simply because they are our members. In largely religious countries, Christianity was seen as a main factor of the people's voting pattern, whereas ethnicity was seen as the Media / Persian law which cannot meet in harmony, except with clubs and gun powder.

Poverty/Economic Factor:

There is a major challenge in the area of poverty as it concerns the attitudinal changes among the Nigerian citizens. According to Ekpu (2010:38), More than 70% of the population is estimated to live below poverty line. The United Nations report of Nigeria's Human Poverty Index (HPI) is 41.6 percent, thus placing Nigeria among the 25 poorest nations in the world. Due to the poor state of most Nigerians, especially

at the grassroots, they accept anything from anybody who asks for their vote. In an opinion poll conducted while gathering the data for this study at Umuokparaluwe Umuduru in Isiala Mbano Local Government Area of Imo State, it was revealed that due to abject poverty among the citizens and the inability of the government to come to see to the welfare of the people, they accept money, cups of rice or beans, wrapper, salt, etc. from any politician who comes for their votes. According to Eze, (2010) –We have no option, at least, we will be able to take care of that day's meal with the token given to us, conscience notwithstanding.‖. This statement supports the wise saying accredited to Chief Emeka Odimegwu Ojukwu in a Network News, that:

A hungry man is an angry man, an angry man   is   an unreasonable man, and an unreasonable man is a violent man. It does appear that a hungry person does not reason properly to consider what is right or wrong. He is unreasonable, and could be violent due to hunger, except whatever will fill his/her stomach is at hand.

Pocketbook voting is another problem. Pocketbook voting is a political concept that sees voters casting their votes based on how they perceive their personal economic circumstances. Essentially, pocketbook voting is what researchers term a "selfish" factor, (Hawk, 2010:1). Rather than vote for the common good, people vote on the belief that the person for whom they are voting will help their personal economic situation.

Political behaviour as a framework is best use to analyse the ethnicity, religion and poverty/economic as factors affecting voting behavior in Nigerian electoral system due to its ability to exposing human's prebendalism as it relates to attitude in ones voting convictions and voting behavour. The study has shown that the three concepts also inhibited the inability of the nation electing credible leaders at the end of every election. The voter's motivation is against the purpose of election according to Yusuf (2008:1), Election has become the most acceptable means of changing leadership in any given political system.

Ways Forward and Conclusion:

In 1993 Presidential Elections, ethnicity played a less important role in the voting behavior as the winner of the annulled election Chief M.K.O Abiola was voted for, not just by people from his ethnic group but also by people from other ethnic groups. The Alliance for Democracy, (AD) which was dubbed ‗‗the Yoruba Party'' in 1999,

has since 2003 been losing elections in most of the Yoruba states. This

marked a change in what had previously been the trend. With this development, it is believed that Nigerians are now realizing the disadvantages of voting based on ethnic sentiments and religious inclinations. Paradoxically, the truth is that the trend is now re-introduced with President Jonathan's declaration to run for the 2011 presidency under the platform of PDP. The North has arisen to demand for the seat because the zoning rule policy in PDP gave them the mandate but the South said that the zoning should be ignored. Under this pretence, the North reached a consensus to produce one capable candidate to contest against Jonathan during the party primary. Where the president comes from is the matter at stake and not the party that wins the election. This is in conformity with the theory of Political Behaviour explained above. However, it is not out of place for people to return to ethnic motivated voting behavior if the ethnic motivated voting is being marginalized in government (Nworah et, al, 2007: 15).

To seriously address this problem in Nigeria, the need for electoral reform should be seen as an innovation that would bring better things to Nigeria electoral system. All the while the voting behaviors have been a concept set by the ethnic regions and the religious sect to usurp powers and control the economic, social, and political life of the great country, Nigeria. Hunger or poverty/economic considerations have been described as the most fundamental factor that compels the citizens to cast their vote for those who give them gratifications. But the ideal situations are being looked for in future elections in Nigeria.

At this point, the paper calls for the rebranding of the electoral system and voting behavior of the Nigerian electorate system to meet the challenges of the new _World Order' and civic responsibilities. From historical records, it can be deduced that the electoral system in Nigeria has a lot of lapses which make it possible for political leaders to rig elections, while voters rely on their ethnic loyalty, religious masters and the power of gratification to cast their votes not minding the person's credibility. This proposition was confirmed by the court of Appeal sitting in a recent election petition matter which described the Nigerian electoral Act 2006 as an Election Rigging Manual, (Abubakar, 2007).

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