

Automatic Ticket, Elections and Democracy in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The paper examined the impact of automatic ticket on elections and democracy in Nigeria. The paper contends that automatic ticket robs the electorates the political mandate which is reinforced by pervasive electoral fraud as orchestrated by the political elites in their unbridled quest to have unrestrained access to state power and resources. The paper noted that the issuance of automatic ticket to loyal political contestants by the political god fathers or king makers has in recent time become a cog in the wheel of democracy in Nigeria.

Key Words: Automatic ticket, Elections, Democracy, Political godfather, Electoral Fraud.

Introduction

Liberal democracy is basically anchored on competition and freedom. This competition among politicians or public office seekers for the legitimizing consent of the electorates must be guided by the 'rules of the game'.

The electorates on the other hand must have the freedom to choose from among alternatives particularly in terms of political parties and who eventually becomes their leader. This competition and freedom are encapsulated in election as every election in a democratic dispensation must guarantee free

and fair competition and unfettered freedom of the people to choose from among alternatives. Election, therefore, connotes the conduit pipe through which the people transfer their legitimacy to their leaders and engender the democratization of the polity.

Political parties which must be ideologically based serve as the hall mark of modern democracies and as a platform for election. The character of the political parties in terms of their formation and orientation would go a long way to influence election and democracy in a polity. It is evident that elections in Nigeria are characterized by ethnicity and electoral violence arising from the dissatisfaction of the contending groups as a result of the lethal electoral frauds (Oddih, 2007, Illufoye and Baba, 2007, Garuba, 2007). Over Time, what appeared to be mere consideration of ethnic equation in the electoral calculus of Nigeria's political system has shifted to electoral malpractices such as replacement of names of eligible candidates of other political parties, upturning of electoral results, rigging and falsification of electoral results, stuffing of ballot papers, printing of fake ballot papers, corrupt practices of electoral officers and security agents, thuggery, abduction and killing of political opponents etc.

These electoral malpractices have been restructured, modified and improved upon. For instance, the writing of electoral results days before actual election not only signals the height of sophistication in electoral malpractice but also an indication that the votes of Nigerians no longer count. Part of this sophistication in electoral malpractice is the issue of automatic ticket-a situation where influential high ranking politicians (godfathers) decide who contests and wins election. It is against this backdrop that it is argued in this paper that automatic ticket aside from the fact that it is notoriously undemocratic, it forecloses the chance of competent and eligible contestants to freely contest election and vitiates the efficiency of election in legitimizing the political authority of the leaders.

Operationalizing Automatic Ticket

Automatic ticket is a precipitate of long period of sophistication in electoral fraud in Nigeria. The dictionary meaning of the word, automatic says that it is working by itself without direct and continuing human operation (of a firearm) reloading itself from an internal magazine, or able to fire. As long as there is pressure on the trigger: of (the gears of) a motor vehicle, operated by automatic transmission (of behavior, reactions etc) done, etc without thinking (chambers 20th Century Dictionary, 1983 p.) Ticket, according to the same chambers dictionary means a card, slip, or (formerly) placard bearing a notice or serving as a token of any right or debt, as for admission, penalty for the some offence (esp.monitoring) etc. a certificate (slang): discharge from the army: a list of candidates put forward by a party for election (U.S) any or all of the principles associated with a particular political party especially as a basis for its election to government: a visiting card: to label: to designate.

From the foregoing, ticket connotes a clearance, approval or go ahead-order given to a candidate by his or her political party to contest election on its platform. The issuance of this ticket is based on the certified membership of the party, commitment and loyalty to the cause of the party and the personal trait of the candidate, especially his ability to deliver the dividends of democracy to the people and satisfactorily represent the ideals of the party. This ticket before it is given to the candidate must have passed through the crucibles of the internal democracy of the party hoisted on effective structural framework that reflect the popular choice of members of the party. However, this ticket becomes automatic when influential top notchers of the party who see themselves as ‘godfathers’ or kingmakers, constitute themselves into a Shadowy party’ and decide what happens in the party including who contests election on their party platform. This Shadowy party is made up of powerful business men,

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former and serving top political office holders, top bureaucrats, influential traditional rulers, retired high ranking military officers and other members of the public who in one way or the other influence unduly the activities of the party. Perhaps, this may be in line with the views of the Elitist theorist like GeatenoMosca, Vifredo Pareto and Robert Mitchell who posited generally that in every society the few (elites) rule (Guaba 2000). But our conception of democracy is that the few (elites) must rule according to the dictates of the people and be transparent and accountable to the people. The voice of the people must be heard. (Vox Populi Vox dei-the voice of the people is the voice of the god). The internal democracy of the party must also reflect this democratic creed in which members of the party must decide what happens in the party including who contests election on their party platform.

It is the 'Shadowy party' which operates behind the scene that determines what happens in the actual party. Smith and Zurcher, (1944:190 as cited in Ibeanu2007:9) likened it to a political machine. They noted that a political machine is an organization controlled by a boss or a small coterie of leaders which subjects party organization and public officials to their will and operates efficiently ruthlessly in exploiting governmental activities of nearly every sort for the private gain of its members.

It is only when there is conflict of interest among members of the 'Shadowy party' that they can part ways and factionalize the actual party, thereby plunging the actual party into seemingly intractable political quagmire. But if there is a convergence of their interest, a political godson or daughter can be adopted and be given automatic ticket and sponsored in an election provided he or she is 'loyal' irrespective of who he or she is and whether he or she is the choice of the people or not. Thus, 'Loyalty' which is a condition for the issuance of automatic ticket becomes the only bond between the political godfather and the godson. Unfortunately, this loyalty ties one (political godson) to the apron string of

the 'godfather' as the godson works not according to the rationality of his mind but according to the selfish and parochial dictates of the godfather. The over celebrated cases of chief Emeka Ofor and Governor Chinweoke Mbadinuju, and the case of Uba and Governor Chris Ngige all of Anambra State of Nigeria are pointers to this effect. What else can be more than a slave? In the political parties in Nigeria and indeed the entire polity, what we have are the "Masters" and the 'Slaves'. Perhaps, Rousseau had this in mind when he said that "Man is born free but is seen everywhere in chains".

Automatic ticket means that an adopted political godson can contest, win an election and serve in a particular office as many times as he wants provided he is 'loyal'. This obviously renders superfluous the need for a political party as a veritable instrument of democratization. Political parties are sine qua non for democracy as they mobilize the people for political participation. Bogdanor (1984) stated the essence of political parties aptly when he said that political parties are an indispensable part of the democratic process. In almost every modern democracy, government by the people turns out to be government by party: and democratic elections enable the people to choose among competing parties or party nominees who offer themselves as candidate for office. Since mass suffrage began, parties have been the central instruments of representation in democracies, they have been to adopt Bagehot words, the hyphen joining the electorate to government, the main transmission belt through which the demands of the people are conveyed to those who aspired to rule the state. Bogdanor (1984).

It is because they are so fundamental to popular governments that the changing fortunes of political parties can be said to mirror the health of democracy itself.

Given the importance of political parties in the democratic process as stated above Bogdanor (1984), it means that the pollution of political parties by way of automatic ticket which serves the selfish and parochial interest of the so called godfathers not only scuttles the freedom of the people to choose candidates of their choice, it also destroys the space for healthy political contestation, thereby reducing democracy to a mirage. It should be noted that the automatic ticket prevalent in elections of political parties in Nigeria is a precipitate of the changing patterns of elections in Nigeria occasioned by the hostile and unsavory legacies of colonialism.

Patterns Of Elections In Nigeria

Election in Nigeria can be traced to the quest by the educated elites to have a Legislative Council that is made up of elected representatives instead of the nominated members by the colonial masters. This quest for elected representatives was informed by the need to participate in the governance of their affairs. This agitation by the educated elites led to the introduction of elective principle by the 1922 Sir Hugh Clifford constitution. The constitution actually led to the introduction of elective representation in the Legislative Councils for Lagos and Calabar. Although, the number was quite infinitesimal and was not based on universal adult suffrage-only adult males with a gross national income, from all sources, of not less than one hundred pounds (100.00) were allowed to vote, it actually marked the genesis of elections in Nigeria. Other restrictions imposed on the voters is the electoral rule that required every candidate for nomination to deposit a sum of ten pounds (10) towards the cost of the election and the one that demands that all voters must register in their municipal areas. The latter rule scared some voters because of anxieties about paying taxes and rates on the basis of the exercise Nnadozie (2007). The implication of these inhibitive electoral laws was that it drastically reduced the number of voters. For

instance out of the estimated 40,000 voters for Lagos only 3,000 were eligible to vote while in Calabar out of the estimated 10,000 adult African males, only 1200 were eligible to vote (Okafor, 1981:197 as cited in Nnadozie, 2007: 47). On the heels of NNDP was the formation of Lagos Youth Movement in 1933 and in 1936 it became known as the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM).

The NYM broke the monopoly which NNDP had in Lagos and between 1938 and 1941, the NYM won all the elections for the Lagos Legislative Council and widened the traditional catchment area in Lagos from which unofficial members were recruited. However, the party could not survive the schism arising from the personality clash between Ernest Ikoli and Samuel Akinsanya-two leading members of the party. This Ikoli-Akinsanya conflict was seen as ethnic conflict which split the party (NYM and eventually led to ethnicity and regionalization of politics and election in Nigeria (Nnoli, 1980:140-158 as cited in Nnadozie200:48).

As a prelude to the ethnicizing and regionalization of politics and election in Nigeria is the fact that the colonial policies of divide-and rule as it finds expression in the indirect rule led to the balkanization of the country into provinces, protectorates and later regions. This balkanization actually reinforced fissiparous (divisive) tendencies, and the sudden amalgamation of the protectorates in 1941 obviously led to a "marriage of inconvenience" Wonah (2010: 108).The inconvenience associated with such sudden amalgamation was largely due to the fact that component units or ethnic groups did not see themselves as people who are expected to belong to a country called Nigeria. There was mutual suspicion of domination, suppression and intimidation among them, especially among the three major ethnic groups Ibo, Yoruba and Hausa/Fulani Wonah (2010).

In order to protect their interest, the ethnic groups shrunk into their 'ethnic cocoons' and formed socio-cultural organizations which later metamorphosed into political parties. For instance, the Hausa/Fulani formed a socio cultural organization known as Jametayi-Arewa which later became a political party known as Northern People's Congress. The Yoruba also formed the Omo' Ogbe Oduduwa, a socio cultural organization which also later became a political party known as Action Group (AG). However, National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon which later changed to National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) was truly a national party. But the mass exodus of non-Ibos from the party made it an Ibo party. Thus, the three political parties were out to protect the interest of their ethnic groups to the point that issues that were supposed to be seen from the broader national perspectives were now seen from the narrower ethnic or regional points of view. Evidently, apart from the fact that it infused ethnicity into the body politics of Nigeria, the political parties also lacked ideology; and rather than perform the traditional roles of national integration and political reawakening, they actually became agents of disintegration. Political parties are therefore seen as property that must be acquired in order to satisfy selfish, parochial and sectional interests. Herein lies the problem of democracy in Nigeria.

Given ethnic consideration in the body politics of Nigeria, the 1947 election was characterized by ethnicity as the political parties (AG, NCNC, NPC) maintained their ethnic stronghold. The 1947 election was sequel to the introduction of Arthur Richard's constitution of 1946 which established for the first time a central legislature for the country. Of the 24 members of central legislative body, only four (4) were elected or nominated by either the colonial authorities or the regional local authorities. The point being stressed here is that beginning from the early forties; ethnicity has been a dominant factor in

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elections in Nigeria. For example the 1954 and 1959 federal elections demonstrated clearly the pattern of voting. (See tables 1 and 2).

TABLE1: POLITICAL AFFILIATION OF MEMBERS ELECTED IN THE 1954 FEDERAL ELECTIONS INTO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

POLITICAL PARTY	EASTERN REGION	NORTHERN REGION	WESTERN REGION	LAGOS	TOTAL
INDEPENDENT					
A.G	3	1	18	1	23
NCNC	34	2	22	1	59
NPC	-	83	-	-	83
UNIP	4	-	-	-	4
N.C.L.P	-	-	1	-	1
INDEPENDENT	1	1	1	-	1
NO INFORMATION	-	6	1	-	7
TOTAL	42	92	42	-	178

Source: S.O Okafor 1981: 79 N.B UNIP-United Nations Independent Part. NCLP-NIGERIA Commoners

Liberal Party

TABLE 2

The result of the 1959 Federal Elections into the House of Representative show party strength in the regions

POLITICAL PARTY	EASTERN REGION	NORTHERN REGION	WESTERN REGION	LAGOS	TOTAL
INDEPENDENT					
A.G	14	25	33	1	73
NCNC	58	-	21	2	81
NPC	-	134	-	-	134
NEPC	-	8	-	-	8
NDC	1	-	-	-	1
INDEPENDENT	1	-	-	-	15
TOTAL	73	12	62	3	312

SOURCE: Okafor 1981:224.

However, it appears there is a paradigm shift in the elections in Nigeria beginning from the early 1960s. Although in as much as there is still ethnic consideration in the formation of political parties, the election pattern seems to diminish ethnic consideration by emphasizing on the conspiracy of the political elites to actualize their selfish and collective aggrandizement by hoodwinking the masses through massive electoral fraud. Nnadozie (2007) captures this aptly when he observed that NCNC and NPC which were ethnically based political parties formed a coalition government at the federal level. Shortly before the elections, the census controversy had put each of the dominant parties on its toes. The hope of Southern faction of the dominant class in Nigeria to use the census figures to break the predominance of their Northern counterpart at the federal level has been dashed. It should be recalled that NCNC and the NPC had been in coalition at the federal level since the last federal election. However, events in the country, especially since the 1962-4 census controversy tend to point to the direction of a collapse of the alliance. Nnadozie (2007) captures this aptly when he observed that "The 1964/5 elections were therefore only one of the several litmus tests that faced the country in the first five years of her independence. In the face of these problems, the Nigerian leadership both individually and collectively were only busy exploiting the situation to aggrandize themselves. Clearly, the political flirtation of public office seekers from one political party to the other just to have access to state power and resources is a clear indication of the heinous resolve of the political elites to protect their selfish interest and acquire more governable space. This becomes a do-or-die affair Kaarfi (1989:69).

Ake (1996) corroborated the above fact when he noted that the political environment at independence became a war front as the struggle for power became fierce and internecine. The affects were that the state and its apparatuses became veritable means of harassment, intimidation and abuse, and

development was marginalized. Rather than channel state resources into productive ventures that would have multiplier effects on the economy, the political elites engaged in primitive accumulation of state resources. This is exemplified in the looting and misappropriation of the state resources.

In order to still hold on to state power or have access to it, automatic ticket was devised by political elites who are either currently serving public officers or out of power but would want to have appreciable influence within the governable space and this has grave consequences on election and indeed democracy in Nigeria.

Implication For Elections And Democracy In Nigeria

At the risk of repetition, election is the litmus test for democracy. Aside from the fact that it transfers legitimacy to the representatives (leaders), it is also an eloquent expression of the 'general will' of the people.

According to Schlozman and Verba (1985) election is a mechanism for choosing meritorious individuals in whom to entrust governmental power. Burnham (1985) observed that elections without choice cannot be democratic. He went further to say that nominally; free elections in which incumbent elites more or less drastically and grossly limit major components of choice are remarkably common around the world.

Automatic Ticket, Elections And Democracy In Nigeria

The massive electoral fraud and violence (or the threat of violence) against electoral opponents is an obvious mechanism of constraint of choice. The contention here is that automatic ticket by its exclusionary nature is also a constraint of choice. Consequently, it cannot guarantee free and fair election and by extension, it militates against democracy. This is because the leaders that will emerge

out of the debris of automatic ticket will not be answerable to the people rather they will be answerable and accountable to their godfathers who gave them the mandate through the issuance of automatic ticket. The effect is that transparency will be thrown to the dustbin and the government constituted by 'loyal boys and girls' will not be responsible and responsive to the yearnings and aspirations of the people. Instead they will be responsible and responsive to their godfathers. It follows that a government that takes over power through the instrumentality of automatic ticket cannot claim to be democratic or legitimate.

Nwoye (2009): As cited in Oddih (2007) maintains that democracy signifies political system dominated by representatives either directly or indirectly chosen by the people. The choice of the people must be through free and fair elections but if the choice of the people is scuttled by means of automatic ticket, democracy becomes all illusion. One of the cardinal objectives of democracy is that the people must participate in the process of decision making either directly or indirectly. They participate indirectly through their elected representatives who must be answerable and accountable to the people.

The representatives must be products of free and fair elections. But due to automatic ticket, the people are alienated from the process of decision-making and this is a great disservice to democracy in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The historicism of elections in Nigeria is replete with cases of ethnicity, massive electoral fraud coupled with the incidence of automatic ticket. These indices are eloquent testimonies of the unbridled quest of the political elites to have access to state power and resources in order to actualize personal aggrandizement predicated on selfish, parochial and sectional interests. Thus, ascendancy to state power

becomes a do-or-die affair and one of the means of achieving it is by automatic ticket. This automatic ticket denies the people of their mandate in electing their leaders. In order to de-emphasize the premium placed on the state power as a means of having access to state resources, Public Offices should be made less attractive in terms of salaries and other booties of office. Furthermore, Public Officers should publicly declare their assets as demanded by the constitution before and after their tenure. In addition, anti-graft laws should be strictly enforced and laws banning automatic ticket should be enshrined in the constitution of Nigeria. These measures, if applied, it is hoped, would instill some modicum of civility into public office seekers, thereby curbing, if not totally eliminating the incidence of automatic ticket and other electoral malpractices in Nigeria.

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