

ELECTORAL POLITICS AND THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

It is a known fact that election is a yardstick to democratic system in any society. Infact, what determines the beauty of a democracy is the conduct of free and fair election. However, Nigeria's democratisation processes have always been marred with electoral irregularities,flaws and manipulations.Since the inception of independent government in 1960,the county's electoral bodies have always been faced with hurdle of conducting elections that would be applauded by both local and international observers.This makes it imperative in this paper to explore electoral politics and Nigeria's democratic process.The paper infers that untill free and fair election is ensured in the country,enhancing democratic virtues may be a mirage.

Keywords: Election, democratic system, plitics

INTRODUCTION

In a liberal democracy, election is the best option to change government periodically. It does not only promote leadership change, it encourages accountability in leadership. It allows for participation and it helps to reside power to the people. To be precise, elections are the best means to make the sovereign power of the masses known. Ojie (2006) states that in democracy, those whose responsibility is to exercise political authorities in a society perform it with the explicit consent and genuine mandate expressed at periodic intervals by the electorate through an open, free and fair electoral process. This implies that democracy must be a system of government where the people dictate the pace with the general consent of the governed. Unfortunately, Nigeria's elections have so far thwarted the foundation upon which democracy is built due to elections rigging. Nigeria is in the category where election management is less successful. The rules guiding elections are ambiguous, ever changing or easily maneuvered; the electoral regulations and rules is institutionally less effective; the political bigwigs are the gladiators in their conduct; hence the electorates are often powerless as they live in the mercy of the political stalwarts and political outcomes. The political barons, who have special interest, impose unpopular candidates and employ form of political gimmick to influence the election in their favours against the general will of the people.

Background of Election/Electoral Politics in Nigeria

During the first republic (1960-1966) six political parties contested for elections namely, National Council of Nigeria Citizens (NCNC) led by Nnamdi Azikiwe, Northern People's congress (NPC) led by Sir Ahmadi Bello, Action Group (AG) led by Chiefs Obafemi Awolowo, Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU) led By Aminu Kano, United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) Led By Joseph Tarka, And Borno Youth Movement (BYM) led By Kashim Imam. However, The NCNC formed government in Eastern Region, AG in the western region, NPC in the Northern region while the federal government was formed by the coalition of NPC and NCNC, with the former a senior and the latter a junior partner. It should be noted that two alliances were forced to contest the 1964 elections; the Nigerian National

Alliances (NNA) and the united people's grant alliance (UPGA). The former was made up of NPC, NNDP while the later was made up of NCNC, AG, NEPU and UMBC.

In the Second Republic (1979-1983), the Federal Elections Commission (FEDECO) was established to register political associations into political parties the criteria set by FEDECO for registration as political parties include the name of the association, its aim, emblem, motto and membership and the location of its headquarters, none of which must give the appearance that the activities of the association are conformed to a party only of the geographical area of Nigeria. In addition, its executive committee had to reflect the concept of federal character of Nigeria (Kirk-Greene & Rimmer, 1981).

At the end five of the 19 political associations the submitted applications for registration as political parties, namely: Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo with its programme of welfare socialism and emphasis on free health care and free education at all levels, the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) with its sound and sensitive right of centre platform and Alhaji Shehu Shagari as its presidential candidate. The people's redemption party (PRP) led by Alhaji Aminu Kano with its democratic humanism ideology, which teaches self-reliance and the takeover of the economy from the grip of neo-colonialists into the hands of the people. The Nigerian people's party (NPP) led by Chief Nnamdi Azikwe and the great Nigerian people's party (GNPP) led by Alhaji Waziri Ibrahim. In the election the NPN won the highest seat of the gubernatorial, national assembly and even the presidential elections, details of which is shown in table 1 below. In the Second Republic, the Nigerian Advanced Party (ANP) was registered to elections with no seat at either the state or the National Assembly.

In the aborted third republic (1992-1993) only two governments established political parties contested the election; national republican invention (NRC) and social democratic party (SDP). In the aborted fourth republic (1996-1998) five political parties were registered to participate; namely; united Nigeria congress party (UNCP), committee for national consensus (CNC, national centre party of Nigeria (NCPN), democratic party of Nigeria (DPN), grass root democratic party (GDP).

In the 1999 elections PDP won the presidency as well as 63 senate seats and 209 House of Representative seats. The election engendered a major legitimacy crisis in Nigeria. This legitimacy crisis led to the government of national unity (GNU) option. This option seemed to be the only one open to a government which as we will show shortly, realized and admitted the flaws that characterized its own emergence.

In 2003, 2007 and 2011 respectively the ruling party (PDP) won the elections but still there was crisis of legitimacy as the elections were rigging and total disregard to electoral procedure as examine in this write-up. Ahead of 2015, the politics has already been heated and started manifesting the same crisis that may come of total disregard to elections rules and guideline e.g. The Nigerian Governors forum election which Ameachi won and which the presidency is not ready to concede defeat.

Nature and Consequences of Electoral Politics in Nigeria

According to Herskovits (1979), Nigeria rejected Britain's parliamentary form of democracy which they had continued after independence in 1960 and chose the first wholly Nigerian-made constitution, to follow the American model instead. This choice was made with characteristic pragmatism: Nigeria, like the United States, is large, complex, and heterogeneous. There was therefore the notion that 'What works for America may work for Nigeria'. Nigeria's form of government looks familiar to the American style as the president

has a four year term and has a possibility of a second term. The national assembly is bicameral, with a senate and a house of representatives distributed among the states by population. There is also the apex judiciary court known as the Supreme Court.

Nigeria's transition towards democracy has only begun. The re-establishment of an elected government after decades of military rule in 1999 formed merely a starting point in a transition process towards a democratic society a transition that can be expected to take many years. Democratic government in its full sense comprises a wide area of issues; a very important one among them is the creation of accountable institutions (Harneit, 2004). Political parties form another core group of institutions in any functioning democratic system. Under current Nigerian conditions, however, most political parties are merely zero-issue alliances of influential individuals and small groups who are able to control; and, often enough manipulate party structures, candidacies and even the electoral process itself.

In Nigeria, a major issue impeding democracy is the selection process of political office holders. This is because so far, the country has been unable to hold free, fair and credible elections. The 2003 elections were billed as a landmark as it was the first time since independence in 1960 that political leadership changed hands from one civilian to another (Herskovits 2007). The election results showed overwhelming victories for the ruling party, PDP as the presidential winner received 70 percent of the votes. According to international and domestic observers alike, the elections themselves were 'disastrous' with even more rigging and violence than during the previous presidential elections in 1999. The run up to the elections also witnessed the assassination of two gubernatorial front runners and violent election related incidents.

Based on how expensive partisan politics is in Nigeria, governments at all levels will rather starve other sector than have their electoral ambition to suffer funding. This is apart from the fact that in most places, governance has almost been suspended from scheming ahead of the polls. As a result, Nigerians may therefore have to wait till elections are completed to enjoy several social amenities promised during the last tenure.

The electoral process has also witnessed legal challenges as contestants take election winners to court to contest such results. A memorable case of this is the Osun State elections which were overruled after three and half years. The election result stated that the incumbent governor, Oyinlola won the elections. The opposition took the election result to court. During the investigation process, it was discovered using biometric machine that several people has voted up to 30 times each for the incumbent governor. The court therefore asked that this votes be cancelled. This led to the opposition candidate Rauf Aregbesola becoming the governor. As a result of almost four years of uncertainty in the state, local and foreign investors lost confidence in the state. As a result, several companies already operating in the state closed and move to other states. This led to massive retrenchment and increased unemployment in the state. It also caused a reduction in state revenue generated.

Such electoral process in Nigeria has a negative impact on the country in general. This is because revenue that could be used to provide infrastructure needed by business are used for funding elections. This has led to continuous borrowing and deficit budget for year 2011. The total budget for the 2011 elections released by INEC was put at N89billion (\$659million). In the federal budget for 2011, another N46.4billion has been allocated to the same elections. Indeed, the total budgetary allocation for elections is about N133 billion naira. It is important to state that INECs budget for 2011 dwarfs the budget of most states of the federation. Osun state has budget of N88.1 billion, Kwara state N68.6 billion and Edo has a budget of N106 billion. It is important to note that this would be funded by government

borrowing. When compared to other developing countries such as Bangladesh, India and Ghana, the cost of per capital basis in Nigeria was more than double. INEC's N74 billion on voters register amount of N 1,138 per capital for 65 million registered voters. Ghana conducted its 2008 elections at the cost of \$ 40 million which amount to \$3 per capital.

The instability caused by flawed elections has led to a threat to foreign investment. As a developing country, Nigeria required foreign investment to survive. The use of large sums of revenue for funding elections rather than developing infrastructure necessary for investment makes the country less desirable to investors. As a result, there is lack of confidence in the country. The political violence and killings have also affected the country's image abroad. There is also a threat to security as assassination of political aspirants and kidnap of their families is becoming rampant.

Recently, the government has taken various measures to ensure free and fair elections in Nigeria. This was affirmed by the sack of former INEC boss, Maurice Iwu who was widely accused of corruption and complacency in electoral result manipulation. The new INEC boss, Jega has committed to ensuring a free and fair election in the country. There has also been the amendment of the electoral law in Nigeria in order to further curb the widespread election rigging in the country.

Nigerian democracy aims to ensure political stability and promote fundamental human rights. Elections in Nigeria which should have been a prelude for achieving a stabilize government accompanied with people's consent have contradicted these standards because of election rigging. This is a serious concern hence the stability and secured environment needed for the success of democracy have been severely jeopardized.

Elections conducted since Nigeria's independence have been played in a do or die affair and this has made the peace-loving Nigerians to be dead scared in exercising their voting rights hence the suicidal nature of the politics. Evident has shown that the rate of citizen participation in elections these days have drastically reduced due to the limited choice and lack of qualified candidates. Lacks of candidates with vision have made the electorates politically weak. Sometimes, the electorates are disenfranchised and the alienated political barons employ the use of coercion to seize power or what Ihonvbere (1989) painted in a general picture of Africa's situation as, ruler-ship became permanent, politics became Hobbesian: power was fought by all means and the struggle for power became the overriding worry. Adekanye (1990:2) notes that because of the history of electoral fraud, elections in the country have often been associated with political tension, crisis, and even violence.

Actually, politics is seen as the only game in town, and it was played with deadly seriousness for the winner won everything and the loser everything. This quest to win election by all means has also claimed the lives of both the electorates and some popular candidates by some hoodlums who want to control the government by dubious means. As a result, those who have the interest of Nigerians at heart have resorted to shun politics for fear of facing a sudden death in the process and this has posed a serious threat to Nigerian democracy and its consolidation. Worse still, electoral body which would have been neutral, and ensure a free and fair elections have been biased because in some cases, they are employed by some power brokers to serve as a rescue mission to some illegitimate candidates to the detriment of popular candidates and Nigerian electorates. To ensure that their unpopular candidates emerged victorious in elections, they have seen election rigging as a way out against the general wish of the popular candidates, electorates and the good of Nigerian democracy. Kurfi (2005:101) has observed, rigging is almost synonymous with Nigerian elections. The main aim of election rigging or malpractice is to frustrate the democratic aspirations of

citizens who have voted or would have voted into office someone instead of the victor. These days, votes do not count because come rain, come sun, electoral body must deliver and no one questions their decisions. In fact, the elections conducted in Nigeria have been cruelly contested that the success of the democratic order has been compromised. This ugly electoral malpractice and rigging have a negative effect on Nigeria's democratic future because the trend is increasing instead of reducing. These trends have actually undermined the chances of successful elections and consolidation of democracy in Nigeria.

Election and its Character in Nigerian Politics

Ibrahim (2007) identifies some forms of electoral fraud in Nigerian, namely:

- a. Illegal printing of voters' cards;
- b. Illegal possession of ballot boxes;
- c. Stuffing of ballot boxes;
- d. Falsification of election results;
- e. Illegal thumb-printing of ballot papers;
- f. Infant voting
- g. Compilation of fictitious names on voters' list;
- h. Illegal compilation of separate voters' list;
- i. Illegal printing of forms used for collection and declaration of election results;
- j. Deliberate refusal to supply election materials to certain areas;
- k. Announcing results in places where no elections were held;
- l. Unauthorized announcement of elections results;
- m. Harassment of candidates, agents, and voters;
- n. Change of list of electoral officials;
- o. Box-switching and inflation of figures.

Added to the above, some politicians who have upper-hand in the government, in an attempt to win an election by all means may call for an illegal arrest and detention of their opponents on or before the Election Day. This as a result, might render mobilization of votes by his opponents very limited. Influential politicians sometimes hire thugs who will rigmarole the streets shooting sporadically in the air at polling centers to scare away genuine electorates who will in return run for their dear lives allowing these thugs to take away the stuffed ballot boxes and replaced it with empty ones.

In the other hand, genuine voters' holders are subjected to fear that election in going to be a do-or-die and the peace loving Nigerians would prefer to stay at home to facing any wanton intimidation and this will enable politicians the chance for massive rigging. Finally, security agents nowadays serve as an instrument for an election rigging. Unfortunately, security agents who are supposed to serve as a symbol of peace and order sometimes collide with some politicians in election rigging. They will scare away voters by carrying out a massive arrest at the targeted locations so as to allocate more votes for their influential masters.

What is to be Done

The various government institutions and agencies concerned must endeavor to improve on their commitment to the Nigerian electorates. This can be fulfilled through proper and adequate remuneration of electoral officers to avoid being induced in the process of election. Similarly, conducting free and fair elections in Nigeria demands strong political will to

expand resources meant for the same purpose for which it is supposed to be used. Diversion of resources to private coffers or to other used other than what it is meant for; constitutes serious set-back on electoral processes in Nigeria. Again, Nigeria must brace up to expectations and adopt sophisticated modern equipment in the conduct of elections in, thus, the use of hi-tech communication facilities such as VSAT Technologies as well as wireless mobile telephones must be encouraged. The computerization project already initiated by INEC needs adequate financial support from government, especially in the area of advance computer technology for its voters registration exercise. There is also the need to avoid undue political preferential treatment on the part of government on other political parties who may be considered as minority parties. This scenario is unhealthy and does not enhance equity and fair play in the electoral processes. It only intensifies and aggravates cases of electoral malpractices and irregularities in Nigeria. Priority of government in terms of funding should be given an equal platform to all registered political parties. This will no doubt bring about competition, justice, transparency and good governance in Nigeria's transition programmers' in this millennium.

In Nigeria's quest to consolidate democracy, there should exist strong opposition party or bodies. In Liberal democracies, opposition parties put constructive pressure on the ruling political party and serve a watch-dog role. It is unfortunate that the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), the ruling party in Nigeria has been hostile to opposition parties, mass media and civil society organizations.

To command loyalty from opposition parties or critics, they have resorted to using appointment to break the ranks of other political parties. When these men from opposition parties held such appointments, they find it hard to resist the lure of carpet-crossing the ruling party (Epia 2003: 11; Obia 2006). The ruling party (PDP) shut down African Independent Television (AIT) because of its critical stance on the third term agenda. The same hostility from the government against the opposition made them deny the people free access to information of government activities as debated in the Information Bill. Worse of it all, some wicked politicians or parties have indulged in the elimination of strong opponents. This in return made the opposition weak and dead scared to push on and some credible members who would have run will hide their dear lives least should they be the next target. To stop this ugly situation, a death sentence should be handed to any contestant found guilty of initiating or carrying out elimination of his opponents because he wants to gain upper-hand in the election. It will be wise to hit anyone who eliminates his opponent because of political position to face the penalty as applies to someone who commits murder. There is need to reduce the materialized nature of Nigerian politics if the country want to attain consolidated democracy. It is true that the financial stake in an election these days have gone to the level that only those who have tasted power previously or work in the government for so many years and accumulate more money are capable of backing their political claims. From 1999 to 2007, Nigerians witnessed politicians claimed to have mapped out billions of Naira (Nigerian Currency) on elections. These billions will be spent in order to win election at all cost.

CONCLUSION

Freedom to vote and participation, leadership responsiveness, accountability and legitimacy hold tenaciously on free and fair elections. Where there is free and fair elections, the citizens will appreciate the values of democracy. What we witness in Nigeria is imposition of wrong candidates on the people's right to choose candidates of their choice, lack of people's participation, absence of leadership responsiveness, accountability and legitimacy. These

factors have raised agitations for the creation of electoral body that will look into fraudulent act in elections.

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