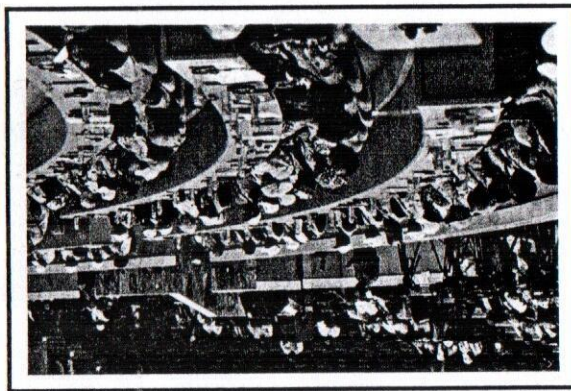


ELECTIONS AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES IN NIGERIA



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Foreword

One can argue that there is a linkage between elections and governance in a democratic rule. This is on the premise that an election is one of the products of political participation/engagements in governance, and governance is largely determined by the choices that the people make during the election. During the electioneering period, political parties and their candidates set out to fish for votes by reeling out the way they will govern - if elected - through their manifestoes, campaign promises, symbolic behavioural show-offs (such as eating roasted corn on the street to show their closeness to the grassroots), and monetary and material empowerments, among others. The electorates will have to choose from the options (political parties) available before them at the poll and are expected to live by the consequences (whether good or bad) of the choice they made when the election winner began governance. This interface simply suggests the linkage between election and governance. This implies that anyone who yearns for good governance may have to pay keen attention to the electoral process. Therefore, there is a need for the interrogation of the two concepts to identify whether or not there is a relationship. And if there is, what is the strength of such?

It is against this backdrop that this book project was commissioned to search for the relationship between the two concepts through scholarly arguments and empirical findings. We, in the Department of Political Science of the University of Ilorin, aim to do a robust and deeper engagement of the two concepts to highlight all germane issues that require further attention through reforms that will engender good governance in Nigeria. In doing this, experts in these areas were shopped across the country to research issues on elections and governance ranging from the impact of the former on the latter to the outcome of the latter from the former. The department is delighted to present the proceedings of this effort in this modest book of thirteen chapters, written in a way that everyone can comprehend. The book is laced with arguments, data, and empirical evidence that are useful for teaching, individual knowledge acquisition, and reference points for researchers. On this note, I recommend the book to all and wish you happy reading.

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CHAPTER TWO

AN ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF ELECTIONS ON DEMOCRATIC SUSTENANCE IN NIGERIA SINCE 1999

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Abstract

With the return to democracy in 1999, Nigeria has experienced more than two decades of unbroken democratic governance with steady conduct of elections. This feat, considering the nation's epileptic democratic history is commendable. More importantly, however, is the question: what impact have these elections been on democratic sustenance? This poser underscores the objective of this paper which shall be to chronologically review elections in Nigeria since 1999 to determine their value to democratic sustenance and development. The article shall be descriptive and qualitative and shall draw on empirical evidence from Nigeria's elections since 1999. The article shall be anchored on the post-colonial state theory and shall derive data through a critical examination of extant secondary data such as reports of election observer missions, relevant journal articles, textbooks, as well as publications of governmental and non-governmental organizations.

Keywords: Democracy, Elections, Election Fraud, Electoral Violence, Democratic Sustenance

Introduction

Democracy, since the end of the Cold War and the third wave (Huntington, 1991) has evolved to be the most sought-after form of government. It has become so essential in contemporary times, that, it has turned out to be a pre-requisite for membership in some international organizations. For instance, the Council of Europe requires that prospective member states must to a reasonable extent be democratic (Council of Europe, 2016). While this requirement is not outrightly stated in its Establishment Act, the final resolution on whether or not a country can become a member of the organization is largely directly related to the level of respect such country accords democratic principles of which elections remain pivotal (Council of Europe, 2016). Similarly, the Community of Democracy as an inter-governmental alliance of states brings together governments of various member states in the search to widen the political space for increased political participation and promote and support democratic values and institutions around the world (Community of Democracies, 2018).

Democracy has indeed become a universal norm. It has been able to flourish through its fundamental ideals of equality, freedom, and justice (Dryzek, 2007) and its attributes which include: free and fair elections, a free press, an independent judiciary, and respect for fundamental human rights (Ojo, 2007). The ideals and attributes of democracy guarantee equality and liberty to settle discords through peaceful dialogue and bring about political changes without bloodshed. Popular rule by elected representatives is the basis of these ideals (Beetham, Carvalho, Landman & Weir, 2008). Such 'popular rule' is expressed in free and fair elections and underscores the centrality of elections to democracy. The rule is also the core of the notion that citizens of a country as embedded in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) have the right to take part in the governance process of their countries (Merloe, 2009). These precepts underlie the evolution of the international election standards (IESs) (National Democratic Institute [NDI], 2013) and the emergence of Election Observer Missions (Kelly, 2012).

While periodic elections are not the only attribute of democracy, they remain one of the most significant indicia for measuring it and are one of the most salient requirements for its

sustenance and consolidation (Schedler, 2001). Since the rebirth of multi-party electoral democracy in Nigeria in 1999, elections have been conducted periodically on a steady and consistent basis. Thus, Nigeria, as a sovereign nation has conducted elections consecutively amidst twenty years of uninterrupted democratic governance, the longest since independence in 1960. This feat is commendable given the country's turbulent political and electoral history. Since independence, the nation's democratic experiments have always been truncated by military coups and counter-coups, and as such no democratic dispensation has lasted beyond five years. Therefore, that Nigeria has undergone twenty years of uninterrupted democratic governance with periodic elections is undoubtedly an applaudable achievement. As commendable as this might be, of more significance is the question: what impact have these elections been on the nation's democratization process? Copious literature exists on elections vis-a-vis democratic sustenance in Nigeria (Adesina, 2012; Anikwe & Kushie, 2011; Omotola, 2007; Oyekanmi, 2011) to mention a few. While these studies provide valuable insights into elections in Nigeria as they impact the nation's democratic sustainability they are devoted to particular elections. They do not holistically focus on the nation's elections since the commencement of the Fourth Republic. This article intends to fill this gap by providing a modest study of Nigeria's elections and their impact on democratic sustenance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The nature of Nigeria's elections since 1999 has largely revolved around monumental electoral violence and brigandage largely orchestrated by faulty elections laced with electoral malpractices and fraud

It is against the backdrop of the above, that this article derives its main objective which is to attempt a chronological review of Nigeria's elections since 1999 to determine their impact on democratic sustenance and/or advancement. The article is descriptive and qualitative and draws on empirical evidence from Nigeria's elections since 1999. The article derived data largely from secondary sources such as reports of election observer missions, relevant journal articles, textbooks, as well as publications of governmental and non-governmental organizations. After this introduction, the article proceeds to a conceptual and theoretical exploration of elections and electoral violence. This is followed by the theoretical framework. The

next section assesses Nigeria's elections since 1999 while the last concludes the article.

Elections and Electoral Violence: A Conceptual and Theoretical Discourse

As a concept, election has been seen as a method of selecting people for certain tasks (Ojo, 2008). It has also been described as a formal expression of preference by the governed that is translated into a mutual decision about who holds public office (Ojo, 2008). This conceptualization of election can be explained within the context of liberal democracy (Nohlen, 1996). One flaw in the definition of election offered above is that elections are not the exclusive reserve of the political realm. This is to say that elections are not peculiar to democratic governments alone. Elections can be used in other spheres such as private organisations to make binding decisions. This may have explained why Yakub (2010) defined election as the process by which leaders are appointed (either in the private or public sector) to or selected for an office.

Elections encapsulate the mediating institutional and psychological process and anchor citizens as adults in an organized and routinized manner, to express their choice among those who seek public political office (Jinadu, 2005). In this view, the election has technical and social connotations (Nwolise, 2007). The technical connotation views election as a method of assigning a post to a person through voting. In the social sense, an election is a method through which an individual is assigned to a post through popular participation of the electorate. Election in this sense is seen as a decision taken by people to confer political power on an individual. Roberts and Edwards (1991) define election as a method for the selection of persons to fill certain offices through choices made by those qualified to vote as stipulated by the rules and regulations governing the electoral process.

In his contribution to the discourse on the concept of election, Shively (2008) conceptualized election as a complex process that involves a choice between candidates or a choice of whether or not a particular policy is to be followed. He further went on to describe it as a formal decision-making process by which a population chooses an individual or set of individuals to hold public offices as well as to decide the course of action and decision on certain issues of great

importance to society. Hence, the psychology of the electoral process lies in the fact that it gives the citizens a sense of relevance. The definition of Shively offered above reveals that elections can be used to determine policy direction. This buttresses the fact that elections are not only peculiar to the realm of politics.

Fischer (2002) electoral violence is any predetermined act that is aimed at influencing an electoral process through all forms of assaults. Sisk (2008) shares this view when he describes electoral violence as any intense act, which in most cases is physical, directed at affecting an electoral process that occurs during elections. Thus, electoral violence is targeted at intimidating electoral stakeholders and influencing the outcome of an electoral process. Albert (2007) explained electoral violence as all forms of coercive acts directed at political stakeholders before, during, and after electoral competitions. The above three perspectives on electoral violence espoused by Fischer (2002), Sisk (2008), and Albert (2007) have a common point of convergence. For instance, the authors see electoral violence as a tool for manipulating the electoral process in favour of a preferred candidate using some forms of crude acts. However, while Fischer (2002) and Sisk (2008) categorize 'random acts' as constituting electoral violence, Albert's conceptualization does not take into cognizance random and spontaneous acts as constituting electoral violence. It is however important to note that elections can also trigger random or spontaneous acts of violence among various electoral stakeholders most especially after the election period.

Theoretically, the nexus between election and electoral violence can be situated within the violence, conflict prevention, and violence-inducing nature of elections (Hoglund & Jarstad, 2010). One of the principal purposes elections serve in a democratic polity is that they help to preserve stability and harmonious co-existence in society. Thus, elections are considered to be key variables in maintaining peace and stability in a political system (Hoglund and Jarstad, 2010). Based on their conflict resolution ability, elections have been considered an integral aspect of cross-country peace-building methods that connect peace to the advancement of democracy (Hoglund, 2009). In this perspective, as instruments of mass inclusion and participation of the citizens in the electoral process, elections provide the framework for

the resolution of conflict in plural and societies just coming of war (Hoglund, 2009).

Elections by their essence involve political competition among individuals and associations and mobilization of the electorate in the electoral process. Such competition and mobilization can lead to violent contentions about the authority of electoral agencies, the fairness of the electoral process, and the legitimacy of election results (Drumond, 2015). Hoglund (2009) observed that the tendency for elections to emphasize differences rather than commonality essentially in highly heterogeneous societies can trigger violence and have a high potentiality of undermining democratic governance. From the foregoing, however, one can deduce that the fact that elections produce winners and losers can engender violence, particularly in developing democracies where elections are seen as a do-or-die affair.

Strauss and Taylor (2009) in their study on the election-violence relationship proposed that the likelihood of an election becoming violence-ridden in a country can be a result of the following: closeness of electoral contests, the type of regime that is operational in such country, rate of growths and the level of heterogeneity. One setback of this claim, however, is that the propositions were not subjected to rigorous empirical tests to be able to test their validity and generalization tendencies. In another perception, Fjelde and Höglund (2014) contended that countries particularly developing and new democracies that practice the majoritarian electoral system type are prone to experiencing violence during elections because the stakes involved in such electoral systems are higher than other systems such as the proportional representation system. In addition, they assume that elections in majoritarian electoral systems are more prone to generate electoral violence in countries with high levels of economic disparity and where ethnic and political groups are systematically kept out of the ambit of state resources and power.

The critical nexus between elections and electoral violence can further be located within the purview of election malpractices, rigging, and fraud. The idea is that when elections are fraught with all kinds of electoral anomalies the resultant effect is the outbreak of violence. In the Nigerian context, Obianyo (2003) noted that the correlation between electoral malpractices and violence can be seen in the historical antecedent of elections in Nigeria. He observed that the tale

of Nigerian democracy has been that of electoral malfeasance in which democratic experiments have been truncated by persistent electoral anomalies and violence.

It can be revealed from the above, that elections exert great influence on electoral violence essentially as it relates to the conditions under which elections are conducted. While poorly conducted elections serve as potent drivers for electoral violence, elections conducted under the ideals of freeness and fairness have the capability of fostering the democratization process and institutionalizing a peaceful electoral process. Electoral violence is inimical to democracy as well as the stability of the political system and the overall peaceful co-existence of the entire citizenry.

Theoretical Framework: The Post-Colonial State Theory

Attempts at explaining the socioeconomic and political experiences and situation of post-colonial African states have over the past decades remained one of the main preoccupations of scholars. These attempts have led to the emergence of various theoretical postulations on the after-effects of colonialism on contemporary African states (Ake, 1982; Cabral, 1982; Ekeh, 1975; Onimode, 1998; Young, 2001). One of the principal theories that have been developed to explain the post-colonial situation and experiences of new nations of Africa is the post-colonial state theory. Post-colonial state theory is an embodiment of ideas concerned with explaining the political, economic, and social impact of colonial rule on formerly colonized states of the world (Elam, 2019). The history and emergence of the theory of post-colonial state is complex (Rukundwa & van Aarde, 2017). Nevertheless, Elam (2019) traced the emergence of post-colonial state theory to the United States and United Kingdom institutions in the 1980s. He argued that theory developed as part of an emerging field of theoretical inquiry, most especially feminism and critical race theory. Postcolonial state theory emerged from anti-colonial thoughts and perceptions from South Asia and Africa in the first half of the 20th century (Elam, 2019).

The post-colonial state theory assumes that without reference to the history of colonialism and imperialism, it will be pretty difficult to comprehend and explain contemporary global issues as they apply to specific countries and continents. The theory also assumes that

formal colonies, those of Africa in particular, occupy a disadvantaged position at the centre of world development (Elam, 2019). The contemporary socio-political and economic realities of post-colonial states can largely be explained by their histories as they relate to the pre-colonial and colonial eras. Ekekwe (1985) noted that the post-colonial state has its roots in the structure and foundation of colonial states which made use of critical features of the pre-colonial traditional state structures. The tale of colonialism in Africa is that of political repression, economic exploitation, and social intervention (Ake, 1982). Colonialism in Africa has left lasting indelible legacies of corruption, ethnic bigotry, politics of brigandage, and prebendalism (Onimode, 1988). Such vices have been the defining attributes of electoral politics of post-colonial African states and have largely been embedded in the socio-political and economic gamut of such countries and above all have defined the political behaviour of the people (Onimode, 1988).

Concerning Nigeria, the unification of the existing traditional socio-political groups into a political entity without their prior knowledge and the partitioning of the country into three regions ignited mutual suspicion, ethnic intolerance, and politics of acrimony such that by the time Nigeria became independent such vices became full-blown and characterized the parliamentary system of government that was bequeathed to the new nation. Electoral politics was played based on the winner-takes-all syndrome and was highly tainted by all sorts of electoral vices such as violence, rigging, and fraud. Consequently, in the first six years as a sovereign nation, Nigeria was plunged into a severe and protracted political crisis, hence the demise of the First Republic. Elections in the subsequent political dispensations have been characterized by unprecedented violence resulting in thousands of deaths and have been largely embedded in electoral fraud, rigging, and malfeasance (EUEOM, 2007; Human Rights Watch, 2011). The propensity for elections in Nigeria to be characterized by all sorts of electoral vices seems to have been captured by Obasanjo (2002 p. 50) when he observed that: 'we fight and sometimes shed blood to achieve and retain political power because, for us in Nigeria, the political kingdom has for long been the gateway to the economic kingdom'.

Elections in Nigeria Since 1999: An Assessment The 1999 General Elections

The death of General Sani Abacha on the 8th of June, 1998 while in power paved the way for the emergence of General Abubakar Abdulsalam as the Military Head of State of Nigeria. On getting to the office, a transition programme was announced which was to terminate with a handover to an elected President on 29th May 1999. On this basis, three political parties namely: the Alliance for Democracy (AD), the All Peoples Party (APP), and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) were registered by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to participate in the elections into legislative and executive positions. In the gubernatorial elections held on the 27th of February, 1999 the PDP won 21 states across the country. The APP won nine states while the AD won all five states in the South-west of the country.

The Presidential election was contested by the PDP and the AD-APP coalition. The PDP presidential flag bearer, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, defeated the AD-APP's coalition candidate, Chief Olu Falae. Consequently, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo was sworn in as the new President on the 29th of May, 1999. Reports of election observer missions that monitor the elections indicated that the general elections were marred by widespread electoral irregularities (The Carter Center & NDI, 1999; Transition Monitoring Group [TMG], 1999). Also, Chief Olu Falae, the AD-APP's coalition Presidential candidate, rejected the results of the Presidential election claiming that they were the outcome of an election process fraught with widespread electoral malfeasance he resolved to seek redress in court (McGreal, 1999).

The electoral malpractices were believed to have been perpetrated by the PDP (Ihonvbere, 1999). The Carter Centre/NDI observer group stated that reports from delegates included low voter turnout, nationwide fundamental electoral irregularities, and abuse of the electoral process including ballot box stuffing, doctoring and inflation of results, intimidation as well as deliberate disenfranchisement of voters. The observer group claimed that there were significant variations between the number of votes recorded at the polling booths and the final results announced (The Carter Center & NDI, 1999).

From the above, it can be deduced that the conduct of the elections was considerably devoid of democratic ethos and was largely repugnant to IESSs. The election couldn't have been free and fair given how the Presidential candidates of the PDP emerged. To a reasonable extent, the PDP presidential primaries were not inclusive (Ajani, 2009). With the annulment of the June 12 1993 Presidential election which was won by Chief M.K.O. Abiola, (Omilana, 2018) a Yoruba man from the South-west, the then military government of General Ibrahim Babangida believed that the South-West has been enraged and the only thing that could placate the geo-political zone was to cede the presidency to the zone. The military government, however, saw Obasanjo as the person who could pacify the Yorubas based on his experience as a former military Head of State (Ajani, 2009). Thus, the elections were merely symbolic, as the transition programme was designed to cede power to a specific zone without recourse to democratic ideals.

The 2003 General Elections

The 2003 general elections because they would be conducted by a civilian government were widely perceived as crucial to the survival of the nation's democratization process (Transition Monitoring Group [TMG], 2003). This is so because the nation as of then has not witnessed a smooth transition from one civilian government to the other. The registration of additional political parties which increased the number of political parties to thirty after a series of litigations set the tone for the 2003 elections. The elections consisted of the National Assembly elections on the 12th of April, gubernatorial and Presidential elections on the 19th of April, and the state assembly elections on the 3rd of May, all of 2003 (International Republican Institute [IRI], 2003). In the Presidential election the then incumbent President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo of the PDP was declared the winner with 24 456 140 while Muhammadu Buhari of the ANPP polled 12 710 022 votes to come second. The PDP also dominated the National Assembly elections and held sway in the gubernatorial elections winning four of the states that were formally under the control of the AD, bringing the number of the state the party controlled to twenty-nine (IRI, 2003).

The 2003 elections were described as being characterized by monumental fraud and election-related violence (Human Rights Watch [HRW], 2004; TMG, 2003). It was reported that over one hundred people were killed and several others sustained varying levels of injuries during the elections (HRW, 2004). In the pre-election period, hundreds of people were killed in violent political clashes and targeted killings without any arrests being made to control further killings (HRW, 2004). Violence became an integral part of the election process to the extent that politicians were involved in the act of violence. It was reported that a politician in Rivers State boasted of how the ruling party had distributed guns to its thugs in his area (HRW, 2004).

To register their grievances against the high level of electoral fraud that characterized the elections, twenty-nine out of the thirty political parties unanimously rejected the results of the election claiming that the results were doctored and as such did not represent the wishes of the people, thereby regarding the outcome as dubious. Observers documented cases of rigging and fraud and as a result refused to assent to the election as credible (TMG, 2003). Reports of the IRI (2003) indicated highly fraudulent vote counting, tabulation, and results collation processes. The fraudulent collation process created a suitable environment for electoral malfeasance and violent reactions across almost all the states of the country. In most of the polling units fighting and intimidation of voters, non-opening of polling booths, and shortages of ballot papers as well as results sheets, prevented many prospective voters from casting their votes (IRI, 2003). With the disappointing conduct of the 2003 elections, one would hope that the country will redeem its image by conducting credible elections four years later.

The 2007 General Elections

The 2007 elections were scheduled to be held on the 14th of April 2007 for the gubernatorial and State House of Assembly elections and the 21st of April 2007 for the Presidential and National Assembly elections (International Crisis Group [ICG], 2007). The presidential election was contested by 25 political parties out of which the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), the All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP), and the Action Congress (AC) were the main contenders.

Results of the Presidential election showed that the PDP's Presidential candidate, Alhaji Umaru Yar'Adua won with 24 638 063. The ANPP's candidate Major General Muhammadu Buhari came second with 6 605 209 votes, while the AC's flag-bearer Alhaji Atiku Abubakar came third with 2 637 848 votes. In the gubernatorial elections held the PDP won 29 out of the 36 states. It also captured 247 out of the 360 House of Representatives seats and won 87 out of the 109 Senatorial seats in the National Assembly (European Union Election Observer Mission [EUEOM], 2007).

Following the flawed elections of 2003, expectations were high for more transparent, credible, and violence-free elections. As noted by Adejumobi and Kehinde (2007), the 2007 elections were an opportunity to redeem the country's image of past flawed elections and revive the public's confidence in the nation's electoral and democratic process. But rather than revive the confidence of the people in the nation's democratization process, the 2007 elections represented a colossal failure and threat to the nation's democratization process (Omotola, 2009). The elections were condemned in all ramifications and have been described as the most flawed in the country's political history (EUEOM, 2007; International Crisis Group [ICG], 2007; IRI, 2007; TMG; 2007).

The elections were conducted with brazen disregard for IESs. Omotola (2009) commented that the elections were characterized by monumental electoral fraud, with officials of the country's Election Management Body getting involved in the rigging process (Omotola, 2009). The complicity of INEC in the electoral process, the resultant characterization of the electoral process by massive fraud and irregularities and reckless campaign speeches and slogans, the most popular being that of the then incumbent president, describing the elections as a do-or-die affair culminated in the occurrence of electoral violence before, during and after the elections (Nwolise, 2007).

Numerous reactions greeted the outcome of the elections. Scholars, political analysts, and election observer missions all expressed their dissatisfaction with the way and manner the elections were conducted. Suberu (2007) argued that the 2007 elections were designed to foster the interest of the ruling PDP through maladministration and manipulation of the election process. In its reports on the elections, the EUEOM (2007 p. 1) lamented that:

The 2007 state and federal elections have fallen short of basic international and regional standards for democratic elections. They were marred by poor organization, lack of essential transparency, widespread procedural irregularities, significant evidence of fraud, particularly during the result collation process, voter disenfranchisement at different stages of the process, lack of equal conditions for contestants, and numerous incidents of violence. As a result, the elections have not lived up to the hopes and expectations of the Nigerian people and the process cannot be considered to have been credible.

In his view, Suberu (2007) noted that though the preceding elections were hardly credible, the 2007 elections were more blatantly fraudulent than the preceding elections and have been the worst in contemporary Nigerian electoral history. Soyinka (2007) in his view, noted that the sham 2007 elections were premeditated by a "gang of four" including the Nigerian Police Force, INEC Chairman (Prof. Maurice Iwu), PDP Chairman, and Olusegun Obasanjo who was regarded as the principal of the gang (Soyinka, 2007). The condemnation and reactions that greeted the outcome of the elections got to a peak when even the then elected President, Musa Yar'adua claimed that the election which brought him to power was not free and fair and was more or less a robbery (ICG, 2007). He, however, promised electoral reforms.

The 2011 General Elections

Following the flawed elections of 2007, the then-incumbent President, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan had conducted a credible election as one of his utmost priorities. Given this, he appointed Professor Attahiru Jega, a perceived principled academic as the Chairman of the nation's electoral body who promised a credible poll on assumption of office. The 2011 elections were initially scheduled to be held on the 2nd, 9th, and 16th of April, 2011 for the National Assembly Elections, Presidential elections, and gubernatorial and State House of Assembly Elections respectively. However, due to logistics problems, particularly the late arrival of results sheets, the electoral body was forced to reschedule the elections to the 9th, 16th, and 26th of April

2011 for the Presidential, legislative, governorship, and State House of Assembly Elections respectively (INEC, 2011a).

In the National Assembly election results, opposition parties slugged it out with the PDP. Out of the 109 Senatorial seats, the PDP won 53, the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) won eighteen, the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) won six, ANPP won four, the Labour Party (LP) won two, the Democratic People's Party won one and All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) won one. In the presidential election, the PDP presidential flag bearer Dr. Goodluck Jonathan won with 22 495 187 votes. The CPC flag-bearer Major General Muhammadu Buhari came second with 12,214. Nuhu Ribadu of the ACN polled 2 079 151. The ANPP's flag-bearer Alhaji Ibrahim Shekarau polled 917 012 (INEC, 2011). Results of gubernatorial elections held in 26 states showed that the PDP won eighteen states, ANPP won three states, ACN won three states, while APGA and CPC won one state each. Results of the House of Assembly elections reflected those of the gubernatorial elections in the sense that the political party of the Governor-elect won the majority of the seats in their respective State Houses of Assembly (INEC, 2011).

The 2011 general elections were described as relatively credible by some election observers compared with what was obtained in previous elections (EUEOM, 2011; European Parliament, 2011; Bekoe, 2011). Commendation trailed the conduct of the elections. Mindful of some noticeable shortcomings, the EUEOM in its reports noted that:

The 2011 General Elections marked an important step towards strengthening democratic elections in Nigeria. Overall, the legal framework for the 2011 General Elections provided an adequate basis for the conduct of democratic elections in accordance with international principles and with the international instruments ratified by the Federal Republic of Nigeria (EUEOM, 2011 p. 1).

European Parliament (2011) in its remark commended INEC on the transparent manner in which the elections were conducted and the security forces for their professional conduct. It further commended the members of the National Youth Service Corps for their contribution to the fair electoral process. Bekoe (2011) in her comments described the elections as being widely perceived as credible compared with the

universally discredited elections of 2007. The scholar, however, attributed the success to the credible and accurate voter register, adequate training and use of election observers, and the parallel vote tabulation used by domestic observers to serve as a check on the official results (Bekoe, 2011).

While the conduct of the elections received commendations amid noticeable shortfalls, the 2011 elections have gone down in history as the most violent (Human Rights Watch, 2011). The period leading to the elections, Election Day as well as the post-election period were characterized by incessant occurrences of election-related violence. It was reported that the violence that occurred after the election in some parts of the North, killed 800 people within a spate of three days, rendered 65,000 people homeless, and destroyed several properties worth millions of Naira. The violence also led to the murder of eleven serving Youth Corps Members on the 17th of April 2011 in Bauchi state (Human Rights Watch, 2011).

The 2015 General Elections

The 2015 general elections were held within the context of an increasing spate of insecurity. To Adelaja (2015) the optimism of the continued existence of the Nigeria state as a sovereign entity was seen as largely dependent on the outcome of the 2015 elections. This cannot be unconnected with the increasing spate of violence in the country occasioned by Boko Haram insurgency, inter-communal conflicts, and armed banditry (Adelaja, 2015). The 2015 elections were slated for the 14th and 28th of February, 2015 for the Presidential and the National Assembly elections and the gubernatorial and State House of Assembly elections respectively. Due to security concerns, the elections were postponed to hold on March 28th and April 11th, 2015 for the Presidential and legislative, governorship, and State Assembly elections respectively. The elections were mainly a straight contest between the PDP and the APC.

The APC's Presidential flag bearer Muhammadu Buhari won the Presidential election with fifteen 424 921 votes while the PDP's Presidential candidate, the then-incumbent President, Goodluck Jonathan polled 12 853 162. The APC also won 64 out of the 109 Senate seats while the PDP won 45. The APC also won 225 out of the House of Representatives Seats while the PDP won 125. The

remaining ten seats were won by APGA, Labour Party (LP), and Accord Party (AP) (INEC, 2015). The 2015 elections were historic. It was the first election since 1999 that an incumbent President would be defeated in an election (EUEOM, 2015). Compared with the 2011 elections, the 2015 elections were marred by low voter turnout (Centre for Public Policy Alternatives [CPPA], 2015).

Overall the 2015 general elections were perceived to have recorded relative success in terms of its conduct (EUEOM, 2015; TMG, 2015). While the elections were described as highly competitive, they were tainted by incidences of violence, abuse of power of incumbency both at the state and federal levels, and attempted electoral malpractices (EUEOM, 2015). In the period leading to the elections, the National Human Rights Commission [NHRC] (2015) claimed that at least 58 people were killed in election-related violence. Election Day recorded dozens of deaths and destruction of properties (Winsor, 2015). Winsor (2015) stated that despite the high number of deaths and violent protests in the 2015 elections, Nigeria received commendation for the conduct of "peaceful" elections.

The 2019 General Elections

The 2019 general elections like the 2015 elections were held within the context of the rising spate of insecurity, particularly occasioned by the farmer-herder conflict and the Boko Haram militant insurgency. Thus, the elections were perceived as having a high potential to generate violence. The elections were initially scheduled to be held on the 16th of February and the 2nd of March, 2019 for the Presidential and legislative elections and governorship and State Houses of Assembly elections correspondingly (Independent National Electoral Commission, 2019). Due to logistics challenges, INEC was forced to shift the elections. The elections were eventually slated for the 23rd of February and the 9th of March, 2019. The elections were distinctive for two reasons. First, it was the first election to be contested by 91 political parties with 84 271 832 potential voters which is the highest in Nigeria's history. Second, it was the first election that was conducted under the administration of a former opposition party - APC (Centre for Democracy and Development [CDD], 2018). Despite the

high number of political parties, the 2019 elections were primarily a contest between the APC and the PDP.

In the Presidential election the APC's incumbent President Muhammadu Buhari with Atiku Abubakar of the PDP. APC's candidate Muhammadu Buhari emerged winner with 15 191 847 votes while Atiku Abubakar came second with 11 262 978. In the Senatorial election, the APC won 62 seats while the PDP won 42. The Young Progressives Party (YPP) won one while four seats were outstanding. The results of the governorship elections including the off-circle governorship election states indicated that the APC controls 21 states, PDP fifteen, and APGA one (Independent National Electoral Commission, 2019).

The Commonwealth Observer Group (2019) observed that amidst noteworthy challenges efforts were geared towards making the electorate vote without hindrances. It, however, noted that in many parts of the country, people were denied the right and opportunity to vote in the election process. In its assessment of the elections, the EUEOM (2019) stated that though the elections were competitive and that political parties were generally able to conduct political campaigns, the elections were tainted by various forms of infelicities, security challenges, and low turnout. It further stated that the elections were characterized by incessant violence spearheaded by the supporters of the two main political parties in the elections, the APC and the PDP. Voters were intimidated, journalists were harassed, and electoral officials in some instances were intimidated. In this regard, the scrutiny of the election process was highly undermined leading to electoral fraud and malpractices in some quarters.

Based on these serious inadequacies, the nation's entire election process requires fundamental improvement for elections to drive the democratization process and be to the advantage of the entire citizenry (EUEOM, 2019). The IRI/NDI Observer Mission (2019) in its report stated that the 2019 elections were characterized by many grave irregularities including intimidation of voters and poll officials, vote buying, and electoral violence. It further reported that non-transparent candidate nomination processes tainted party primaries and as a result, led to violence in some states. The report accused party leaders of their inability to control their members and scold them for electoral crimes. It finally noted that only 35.7% of registered voters

voted in the presidential election - the lowest voter turnout since 1999 (IRI/NDI Observer Mission, 2019).

From the foregoing, it is evident that the conduct of genuine democratic elections in Nigeria is far from sight. Rather than drive the democratization process, elections in Nigeria have proven to be quadrennial threats of democratic retrogression. The 1999 transition elections were stage-managed to cede power to a particular sect without recourse to democratic norms. The 2003 elections were full of electoral malpractices and irregularities and were tainted by election-related violence. The 2007 elections were unanimously declared by election observers as a colossal failure. The 2011 elections though with noticeable shortcomings regarded as an improvement on the previous elections have gone down in the nation's electoral history to be the most violent. The 2015 elections amidst significant pitfalls were seen to have recorded relative success but not without a significant number of deaths and the destruction of properties. The 2019 elections were also characterized by noticeable shortfalls and electoral violence. These elections recorded in succession dwindling voters' turnout.

While democracy needs elections to thrive, it does not require any type of elections (Ojo, 2007). For elections to be democratic they must be free and fair. This notion forms Schedler's (2002) distinction between electoral democracy and electoral authoritarianism. In electoral democracy, elections conform to basic democratic principles while the reverse is the case in electoral authoritarianism (Schedler, 2002). Given the nature of elections in Nigeria, one may not be out of point to describe Nigeria as a typical example of electoral authoritarianism. Nigerian elections have been in most cases violence-inducing and have been largely characterised by systemic fraud at one point or the other. The seeming dwindling voter turnout in elections may have been a result of the loss of confidence on the part of the people in the national elections and the fear of being killed during elections. If elections are the right of the people and are a medium through which the people desire the common good (Alao, 2004) then elections are not worth the life of the electorate.

When elections are fraught with all kinds of anomalies the resultant effect is violence, primarily perpetrated by the loser in an electoral contest who may not have had the opportunity to indulge in electoral fraud. Thus, there is the instigation of violence as a retaliatory

action (Lehoucq, 2003). Obianyo (2003) noted that the correlation between electoral malpractices and violence can be seen in the historical antecedent of elections in Nigeria. He observed that the tale of Nigeria's democracy has been that of electoral brigandage in which democratic experiments have been scuffled by incessant electoral malfeasance and electoral violence.

Conclusion

Nigeria's transition from a military authoritarian regime to a multi-party electoral democracy in 1999 marks a significant epoch in the historical annals of the nation. At the inauguration of the Fourth Republic, few political analysts expressed optimism that the new political dispensation would last for twenty years. It may thus, be astonishing to many, that Nigeria has witnessed twenty years of unhindered democratic rule. While this is celebrated, the nation's election processes have to a large extent been laced with anti-democratic practices, thereby contributing little or nothing to the democratisation process. Expectations may have been that by now, efforts should be geared toward the consolidation of the country's democracy. But despondently, sustaining it is not imminent let alone consolidating it. With its below-standard electoral exploits, the country would have sought solace in the proper functioning of other democratic institutions towards sustaining its democracy but this too, seems not achievable.

The reasons are not far-fetched; political parties are the frailest of all Nigeria's democratic institutions, Civil Society Organisations are not viable (IRI/NDI, 2019); the legislature is not sensitive to the people's needs; and above all corruption remains a potent hindrance to the nation's part to democratic sustenance. With all these factors, democracy is faced with a myriad of challenges. As Diamond (2019) observed, democracy across the globe is facing a crisis. He posited that following the three decades of the spread of democracy is another three decades of its lack of progress. In essence, governments are gradually moving away from being guided by democratic principles in governance. This situation according to him warrants the triumph of autocrats over democrats. In this situation, citizens' rights to participate in the democratic process and freedom of expression are eroded (Diamond, 2019). Nigeria is not an exception to the gloomy picture of

democracy painted above. But all hopes are not lost after all. Democracy can still be sustained and consolidated in Nigeria. This expression of optimism, however, lies in the attainment of quality leadership to drive the democratic process with sincere intentions of strengthening the country's electoral process and other democratic institutions and practices. This can, however, be achieved through a transparent and genuine electoral process based on the popular choice of the people and the benevolence of political leaders elected into public offices.

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