

Elections in Nigeria Since the End of Military Rule

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1.0 Introduction

Since the end of military rule in May 1999, the nationwide elections have been trailed with issues and incidents that generate a lot of anxiety, fear and trepidation. For the record, since the exit of the military from political power, there have been general elections in 2003 and 2007. The conduct and outcome of the elections have left Nigerians intensely divided, bruised and laced with dashed hopes for the practice of democracy. Furthermore, those who have been elected have failed to spread the fruits of democracy to the electorates. Thus, most Nigerians have encountered frustration, disillusionment and disenchantment with elusiveness of the fruits of democracy due to widespread patterns of corruption and unaccountable governance.

For all intents and purposes a lot of political heat has been generated which threaten to undermine the nascent democracy. Consequently, until there are dramatic changes in the course of future elections it feared that Nigerians could relive the traumatic experience of military ruthlessness and dictatorship.

The task of this paper is to examine the elections since the end of military rule in Nigeria in May 1999. To realize this objective, the rest

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part of the paper examines electoral experiences in Nigeria from the colonial era to 1999, subsequently, the paper examines the management of election since the end of military rule in 1999, thereafter, the paper analyzes the flaws associated with the elections and their implications for democratic practice now and the year ahead in the country.

2.0 Electoral Experiences in Nigeria

Election is the cornerstone of democracy. Election is a process vide, which the people choose their leaders and indicate their policies and program preference and consequently invest a government with authority to rule. Furthermore election is crucial to the resolution of conflicting interest in the political system. The first election in Nigeria was held in 1923 following the introduction of elective principle and the establishment of the Nigerian legislative council under the Clifford Constitution of 1922. The election was restricted to Lagos and Calabar, which had 3 and 1 member(s) respectively in the Nigerian legislative council. This was on account of the higher population of educated elites in both towns (Kurfi Amadu 1983). The elections of representatives were based on a limited franchise restricted to males with a minimum annual income of £100. Until 1946 the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) and the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) contested the elections into the four legislative positions in the Nigerian legislative council.

Under the Macpherson Constitution of 1951 the first nationwide indirect election, was held except in Lagos where the direct election through secret ballot were held, to elect majorities into the Regional Houses of Assembly and the federal House of Representatives. The elections were contested by the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) the Action Group (AG), National Council of Nigerians and Cameroon (NCNC) and the Northern People Congress (NPC) The NPC and NCNC won majorities in the Northern and Eastern Houses of Assembly respectively. Neither AG nor NCNC is the election had

majority in the Western House. But through carpet crossing the AG later had the majority.

In 1954, the first ever- extensive direct federal election was conducted under a 50-50 representation between the North and the South. The only exception was that the indirect election was still held in the North. The NPC had majority seats in the Northern region and the highest number of seats, 79 out of 184 in the federal House of Representatives. The AG and NCNC won majorities in the Western and Eastern Regions respectively.

The first nationwide direct elections were held in 1959 following the appointment of October 1, 1960 as the date of Nigeria's independence. The significance of the election was that it constituted the basis of the post independence government. The electoral process was active. The political parties campaigned actively and extensively with some of the major political parties aligning with the minority parties. The AG aligned with the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) and the NCNC with the NEPU. Several other political associations, independent candidates, apart from the major political parties contested the election. The voter turnout was impressive (Kurfi Amadu 1983). But because no single party could win a single Majority the NPC and NCNC formed a coalition government. This saw Alhaji Tafawa Balewa of NPC as the Prime Minister and Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe of NCNC as the Governor General and the Senate president in Nwafor Orizor. AG became the federal opposition in the First Republic.

The various nationwide elections held in Nigeria before her independence were acclaimed to be relatively free and fair with isolated cases of violence, intimidation and repression (Larry Diamond 1988). Thereafter, virtually all the subsequent general elections had been characterized by violence, conflict and hostility.

The first acid test of democratization in independent Nigeria was the 1964 general election. The poor performance of the coalition

government made politicians other Nigerians to be keen about effecting a change. The NCNC and AG reached out by way of a coalition to NEPU, UMBC and Nigerian Socialist Workers and Farmers Party (SWAFP). This led to the formation of United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA). In what seem to be a response to that alliance, the NPC aligned with the NNDP, Dynamic Party, Midwest Democratic Party and Republic Party to form the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA).

The electoral contest was marred with violence, conflict and hostility. In the North and West the UPGA loyalists and candidates and even electoral officers were assaulted and abducted. According to Ikelegbe (1997)

There were so much irregularities, violence fraud, thuggery, molestation, resignation of electoral officials and fraudulently returned unopposed candidates that UPGA decided to boycott the elections ...

President Nnamdi Azikwe refused to appoint Balewa of the NNA as Prime Minister on account of the violence and irregularities, which marred the 1964 elections. This sparked off a constitutional crisis, which took the intervention of the court for a peace to be brokered. Although through the intervention of the court peace was brokered and the constitution of a broad-based government headed by Tafawa Balewa the attendant crises, disillusionment, disenchantment and loss of confidence by majority of the population in the government, significantly motivated the military to usurp political power on January 15, 1966. After thirteen years of military rule the nation was returned to civil rule vide the nationwide elections held in 1979.

The Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) was empowered to conduct the 1979 general elections in line with the presidential system of government. The elections were held into the presidency, National Assembly, state governor offices and state Houses of

Assembly. The elections contested by five parties, the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) the Great Nigeria People's Party (GNPP), the People Redemption Party (PRP), Nigeria People's Party and the United Party of Nigeria.

The political parties campaigned intensely for the election. They mobilized both religion and ethnic sentiments to gain support. The voter turnout was not impressive with the highest being 43% in Anambra State (Kurfi Amadu1983). FEDECO based on available result announced the NPN presidential candidate Alhaji Shagari as the winner of the presidential election

From a comparative vantage the 1979 general election was acclaimed to be relatively successful Adamu and Ogunsanwo (1983) assessed the election thus:

Within the context of bourgeois democracy and against the fiasco of elections the country had witnessed in the past, the 1979 exercise must be considered a higher level of success. The presence of a military government, which rounded up potential party thugs effectively, checked their activities, created a peaceful atmosphere for the elections. The willingness of the party leaders to utilize legal and constitutional devices to disputes contributed to the peaceful elections witnessed in 1979, none of these can be guaranteed in future elections.

Four years later, in 1983, another general election during the Second Republic was held. Civilian government organized the election. Six political parties contested the elections. Nigerian Advance Party was registered by FEDECO in addition to the earlier five, which contested the 1979 elections. Thuggery, violence, massive rigging, irregularities, other malpractices and falsification of results marred the elections. FEDECO, police and other state agents colluded with the ruling party NPN to commit electoral fraud. The ruling-NPN conveniently won the presidential election, and obtained majority seats in the National Assembly and 13 states. The opposition parties on account of

irregularities rejected the outcome of the election. Thus, at the federal and state levels there were several litigations. Tension, uncertainty and insecurity characterized the period. In some states like Ondo and Oyo the gubernatorial elections resulted in large number of cases of arson and murder. As the nation was on the edge of a precipice the military on December 31, 1983 quickly intervened to salvage the situation.

On August 27, 1985 when Ibrahim Babangida took over political power in a counter coup, he declared that he would be brief in restoring civil rule. On August 12, 1987 the Babangida administration held elections into local government council on a zero party basis. In 1989, the administration lifted ban on partisan politics and imposed two political parties, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC) on the nation. In December 1990, local government council elections were held which the SDP won marginally. In December 1991 SDP won 14 governorship seats while the NRC won 16. On July 4, 1992 the National election was held. The SDP won convenient majority seats in both the Senate and House of Representatives. On June 12, 1993 came the presidential election. To many observers the election was the freest and fairest election in the annals of Nigeria political history. However, as part of the results had been released Babangida on June 23, 1993 annulled the election for reasons that were not too clear. The annulment of the June 12 election sparked off intense ethnic, populist and regional antipathy particularly in the South Western part of Nigeria. The intense political pressure within and from the international fronts against annulment compelled Babangida to step aside and cede power to an illegitimate Interim National Government (ING) headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan on August 26, 1993. But because the ING was seen as a subversion of a popular mandate, the clamour for the realization of the June 12 mandate persisted. The nation was brought again to the brink of ruin. It took the intervention of the General Sani Abacha led military for the nation to be saved from collapse.

The common promise made by the military on the usurpation of political power had been to re-engineer the political process and return the nation to democratically elected government in a jiffy. Under the Abacha administration the first election was held into local government councils in 1996 on a zero party platform. In 1997, elections were held into the local government councils, state and federal legislative councils. Five political parties, the Congress for National Consensus (CNC), Democratic Party of Nigeria (DPN), Grassroots Democratic Movement (GDM) National Conscience Party of Nigeria (NCPN) and United Nigerian Congress Party of Nigeria (UNCPN) contested the elections. The elections were largely pantomime as the five political parties bore implicit stamp of military consent and cronyism. This was clearly evident in the adoption of General Abacha as a consensus candidate in April 1998 by the five political parties before his demise on June 8, 1998. Real oppositions were blackmailed, intimidated, and hounded into exile or assassinated.

General Abdulsalam Abubakar, the successor to General Abacha, on assumption of office announced his intention to return the nation to civil rule. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was established and charged with the responsibility to conduct the elections of the registered nine political parties to contest election in the local government councils in December 1998. Based on the showing of the nine political parties in the local council election INEC registered three political parties; the Alliance for Democracy, All Peoples Party (APP) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). The three political parties in February 1999 contested the elections into the states and federal legislative councils, governor offices and presidency. The AD won six governorship seats, APP won nine and PDP twenty-one. The PDP won the presidency and majority seats in both the Senate and House of Representatives.

The elections were characterized by widespread electoral abuses such as horse-trading, undisguised financial inducement of voters, falsification of votes, stuffing of ballot boxes with pre-marked

ballot papers, snatching of ballot boxes and violence. The opposition party, APP in the presidential election rejected the result of the election on account of brazen electoral fraud and went to court to contest the outcome. Although the court threw out the lawsuit, it took much pressure and appeal from Nigerians and the international community for the APP to accept the election results just to avert the bitter experience of another annulment (Olayanju 1999:33).

The above outline on the pattern of political developments in Nigeria revealed that the country was yet to fully embrace the tenets of democracy. Furthermore an election in which any government has been an interested party has never been credible election. The next section reviews the electoral process of the 2003 general elections with a view to determine the extent to which it reflects previous political developments in Nigeria.

3.0 Elections in Nigeria Since The End of Military Rule in 1999

Since the end of military there have been two general elections. The elections were held in 2003 and 2007.

3.1 *The 2003 Elections*

The 2003 general election was crucial in various respects. First it attracted much more international attention than any other election in the political history of Nigeria (Kew 2003:13). Furthermore, it was a test case for the nation's nascent democracy. The election if free and fair was anticipated to solve the problem of a political future for Nigeria, as least on the interim.

The preparation for the 2003 election started with the initiation of electoral bill intended to correct the legal defects of the 1999 general election. But the electoral bill, which was passed in 2002, generated a lot of controversies as the original objective was subordinated for selfish interest. The Presidency and National Assembly in pursuant of second term mandate contrived an electoral law to regiment the political

process of political parties' registration. It took the intervention of the Supreme Court for the political space to be liberalized. The number of political parties was increased from three to thirty. The emergence of the newly registered parties from December 2002 relieved the country of the heat which disappointment could have provoked.

However, with 120,000 polling stations across the country the task of managing the elections to ensure success was beyond the staff strength of INEC. Thus, the INEC decided to recruit ad hoc personnel to assist in the management of the elections. The moral integrity of most of the personnel was suspect and the opposition parties question their impartiality. The opposition political parties alleged that many of the personnel (ad-hoc and Resident Electoral Commissioners) of the INEC were card-carrying members of the ruling PDP.

The INEC preparation for the election was shoddy. This was partly due to the delay by the ruling-PDP in the release of funds to the commission for reasons not too clear. The INEC seemingly became uneasy following the delay to release fund to it that the INEC boss, Dr. Abel Guobadia, threatened to resign his appointment. When eventually fund was released to INEC perhaps due to limited time, it could not comply with certain schedules on the transition programme. INEC ignored delimitation of constituencies and relied on the defunct National Electoral Commission (NEC) delimitation. The disappointment arising from this, by those who alleged political domination in some parts of the country sparked off conflicts. The most spectacular case is the clashes between the Ijaw and the Itsekiri ethnic groups in the Warri area of Delta State.

Within the limited time under the transition programme schedule, INEC embarked on the registration of voters. The registration of voters is a definition of citizenship and an empowerment, which enables qualified citizens to choose their leaders (The Guardian Editorial October 4 1998:16). INEC undertook a computerized voter registration perhaps to check its manipulation by some typically

corrupt Nigerians to secure unfair advantage in the elections. However, the exercise was rife with mistakes, irregularities, and fraudulent practices such that a considerable number of qualified persons who attempted to register were disenfranchised (TMG 2002:57).

The party primaries, preparatory to the 2003 elections, were held by the various parties to choose credible candidates for the different elective offices in the country. In virtually all the party primaries, standard democratic norms were circumvented. Some parties imposed atrocious fees to edge out many aspirants. Some tinkered with party constitution to pave way for the emergence of certain candidates as party nominees. Others imposed their candidates as party nominees on the various constituencies (Odion Akhaine 2003:). These flaws sparked off a lot of conflicts to the point that some party national secretariats (e.g. PDP and ANPP) became theatres of violence (Uko 2003:12). Also the witnessed numerous inter-party clashes, violence, bloodbath, attacks and killings. The high frequency and dangerous wave the political violence assumed compelled the president on March 19, 2003 to convene a meeting of all the thirty political parties commit them to peaceful conduct in the election and to eschew violence. The INEC also made the political parties to sign a pact banning violence during and after the elections (Okoror 2003:8). Some states like Delta, Anambra, Benue, Borno, Kwara, Enugu, Ondo, Imo, Abia Katsina, Rivers, Kano and Plateaus were identified as the most volatile which required special security attention to ensure a successful election (Okoror 2003:8). These measures seem to have had some effect on calming tempers and fears.

The campaigns for the elections were not quite vigorous as the anxiety generated by electoral violence in the pre-election period preoccupied the minds of most of the contestants.

The 2003 elections were staggered for three days, April 12, April 19 and May 3. The April 12 poll was the first in the 2003 general elections. It was held to elect the members of the National Assembly,

comprising the Senate and House of Representatives. Fourteen out of the thirty registered political parties presented no candidate. As it were, Nigeria was the cynosure of all eyes around the world on the April 12 poll. The election was acclaimed as generally peaceful with isolated cases of violence (Ogunsawo 2003:C8). The voter turnout was quite low perhaps for fear of violence

The ruling PDP won over two thirds seats of the National Assembly, both the Senate and House of Representatives. Besides, winning the majority seats in the National Assembly, the PDP made gains in the South West hitherto regarded as AD political enclave. The ANPP and AD won some seats in the two chambers of the National Assembly with the ANPP as the largest opposition. None of the new political parties won a seat in the Senate. And only few of the new parties won seat even in the House of Representatives.

After the April 12 poll came the presidential and governorship election held on April 19. Following the results of the April 12 polls, the ANPP tried to reach out to other parties in form of alliance to have a formidable opposition to stall the re-election bid of President Olusegun Obasanjo of the PDP. The alliance, however, could not be perfected as it came belatedly (Adebayo 2003:26). On its part the ruling PDP struck an alliance pact with the AD in the presidential election.

The commitment of the Nigerian public during the April 19 polls was acknowledged as appreciable as they demonstrated general orderliness (The News 5/5/2003:27). Voter turnout was far higher than the turnout recorded during April 12 polls (TMG 2003:17). There were also considerable improvements on certain area of the electoral process compared with the National Assembly poll (TMG 2003:17). The ruling PDP candidate president Olusegun Obasanjo won the presidential election. Below is a summary of the presidential election result as released by INEC.

Candidate	Party	Votes Polled	%
Olusegun Obasanjo	PDP	24,456,140	61.94
Muhammadi Buhari	ANPP	12,710,022	32.19
Emeka O. Ojukuru	APGA	1,297,445	3.29
Jim I. Nwobodo	UNPP	169,609	0.43
Ganiyu Fawehinmi	NCP	161,333	0.41
Sarah N. Jubril	PAC	157,560	~0.38
Ike O.S. Nwanchukwu	NDP	132,997	0.34
Chris O. Okotie	JP	119,547	0.30

Source: *Centre for Democracy and Development Briefing on Nigeria's Elections*

As indicated in the above table, the Presidential candidate of the PDP Olusegun Obasanjo won the presidential election of the April 19. The PDP also dominated in the governorship elections of April 19. Out of the 36 states in Nigeria PDP won 28, while ANPP had 7 and AD 1. This result represents a tectonic shift in the country's political equation. In 1999 the PDP controlled 21 states, the ANPP (then APP) 9 and AD 6. In 2006, through court pronouncement the PDP lost the governorship seat in Anambra state to All Progressive Grand Alliance. The PDP maintained its lead in all former strongholds but one. PDP lost Kano state to ANPP. However, the PDP won three states (Kogi, Kwara and Gombe) formerly controlled by the ANPP. The PDP also won in all former AD strongholds (Ogun, Ondo, Osun Oyo and Ekiti) except Lagos, which was retained by the AD. The outcome of the election generated furious reactions from the opposition parties. The defeated AD in the southwest threatened to re-enact the operation wetie of the First Republic (Oshunkeye and Orimolade 2003:24). The opposition parties severally and collectively under the aegis of the Conference of Nigerian Political Parties rejected the election result, and called on the international community not to recognize any government constituted on the basis of the 2003 election.

Amidst protest of the outcome of the April 19 poll came the May 3 poll, which was held to elect members of the states Houses of Assembly for the 36 states of Nigeria. Apparently, due to the general disappointment with the conduct and outcome of the April 19 poll, many of the opposition parties threatened to boycott the May 3 poll and in fact dismantled some of their campaign structures before the date of the poll. As was the case of the April 19 polls, there was improvement in the electoral process. However, the voter turnout was low across the country (TMG2003:26-27).

In the May 3 election, like the earlier ones the ruling-PDP continued its winning streak. Most seats in the Houses of Assembly of the 36 states were by the PDP. In fact, in some states like Edo there is no opposition member in the house of assembly. Over 56% of the 2003 nationwide election outcome was challenged in court (Haruna 2003:7). Except for the Anambra State governorship election that was upturned, the courts upheld the results of most of the election.

It took a long time for the ripples of the 2003 general election to completely settle. On July 10, 2003, the Anambra state governor, Dr. Chris Ngige was abducted and forcefully ousted from office in a plot masterminded by Chris Uba who allegedly claimed to have bankrolled his election. Also the defeated ANPP presidential candidate General Buhari on September 23, 2003 in deference for refused police permit organized mass rally in Kano to support his legal battle against the election of president Obasanjo of the PDP. In December 2003, the CNPP continued to rally for international support against the government constituted on the basis of the 2003 nationwide election. The CNPP called on the Commonwealth to ostracize president Obasanjo until a credible election is held in Nigeria (Bisi Abidoye 2003:C3). There were also various calls by many Nigerians for electoral reforms, recommendation of a single-five year term for governors and the president, convocation of a sovereign national conference.

The response of the ruling PDP to the criticisms and condemnations of the 2003 general election has been militaristic, hostile and bellicose (Oba and Ubani 2003:53). The EU Election Observers team was accused of plotting to destabilize the country base on its reports on the election. Leading opposition parties about to hold rallies have been hounded either by refusal of police permit or imposition of prohibitive sums of money to be paid for the use of venues. In fact the actions and utterances of opposition parties have been likened to “coup” (Ogbodo 2003:12). This tension soaked atmosphere was carried through the second term tenure of President Obasanjo and into the preparation for the 2007 nationwide elections

3.2 *The 2007 Elections*

The 2007 general election is significance in several respects. First it was the first second consecutive elections under any civilian administration. Furthermore, it is the first election intended to ensure the change of leadership from one president to another. Thus, the election can be regarded as a test case for deepening Nigeria’s nascent democracy. Also, the successful conduct of the election was a matter of international concern. As the saying goes, “How goes Nigeria, so goes the rest of Africa” (Ibrahim 2007). Thus, with the conduct of the 2007 election Nigeria became a cynosure of international attention.

The preparatory for the 2007 general election like the 2003 general election, generated a lot of political heat and distraction. First, the polity was heated by President Obasanjo declaration that the 2007 election would be a do or die affairs (Chidiebere Onyemaizu 2007:14). In addition and more particularly, the attempt to amend the Nigerian constitution in order to elongate the tenure of the serving president and the governors heightened the tensed atmosphere in the country. The ill-famous plan failed on account of the strong opposition against it by many Nigerians, some members of the National Assembly and the international community (Chidiebere Onyemaizu 2007:14). Instructively, the supporters of the tenure elongation popularly referred to as third term agenda were assured re-nomination in the 2007 election

while the opponents of the project were hunted about with security agencies such as the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) and the Economic Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) (Ibrahim 2007). After the failure of the attempted third bid, there was perhaps virtually no much time left to improve on the weak electoral law used in the 2003 election. In fact, only little amendments were made and passed in June 2006.

Thereafter, dangerous signals of an unsuccessful conduct of the election unfolded as expressed in the electoral and political shenanigans of both the INEC and some of the political parties. The preparation of the INEC for the 2007 election was shoddy. The voter registration exercise was characterized by a lot of inadequacies, lapses and irregularities, which crystallized in the disenfranchisement of many qualified persons who attempted to register (Osa 2006:3A). Besides, some leading PDP members in connivance with INEC were alleged to have hijacked the process (Osa 2006:3A). The INEC refused, neglected and ignored the relevant sections of the Electoral Act. The INEC failed to display the voters' register as required by the electoral law. These developments resulted in numerous litigations against INEC. There were also numerous litigations against INEC over its ill refusal to include the names of some candidates for the election. The many rulings of the courts in these cases raised some anxiety about the possibility of holding the election. The National Democratic Party (NDP) sought in court to stop the 2007 election (Ulayi and Ige 2007:1&15).

Furthermore, the party primaries in the lead up to the 2007 general election were characterized by undemocratic conducts, internal wrangling, contradictions, which resulted in carpet crossing and defection from the leading parties to newly registered parties such as the Action Congress, ACD, DPA, Peoples Progressive Alliance, Labour Party and Accord. At the same time most of the state legislative assemblies such as Anambra, Oyo, Plateau State were embroiled in constitutional crisis of impeachment. In case of Ekiti the tension

generated led to the imposition of emergency rule for six months. The campaign for the election generated a lot of anxiety and fear. There were few inter-party clashes. Between June and August 2006 three gubernatorial aspirants were assassinated. The tension generated in the lead up to the 2007 election led to the identification of states such as Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Anambra, Sokoto and Plateau as most violence prone (Omonobi 2007:1&15).

The election, which was staggered for April 14 and 21 was organized amid heavy security presence. The April 14, 2007 poll was held to elect the 36 state governors and members of the state Assembly across the country. The conduct of the elections in most states of the federation was said to have totally failed to meet the basic requirements of an election. Across the country, most polling stations did not open at all, with none officials and voting materials. Where voting did occur, it was reported that the voting in key states including Anambra, Cross River, Delta, Ekiti, Enugu, Katsina, Lagos, Osun, Oyo, Rivers and Zamfara was fundamentally flawed (Umunnakwe 2007:34).

In spite of the heavy security presence in some polling stations, the security forces and the government officials did little to protect the rights of voters and the integrity of the process. Several voters were deprived of the opportunity to cast their ballots, some stayed away from the polling stations and some died due to election related violence. The election was allegedly rigged in favour of the ruling-PDP. According of some observers such as the Human Rights Watch was marred by non-availability of voting materials, late commencement of voting, massive disenfranchisement of potential voters, brazen rigging, intimidation and violence (Onyemaizu 2007:14). Owing to the flurry of imperfections and irregularities, which marred the elections the INEC had to reschedule re-run elections in the most affected areas.

In the election, the INEC announced or awarded victories to the PDP in 28 governorship seats, APGA 1, ANPP 5, AC 1, and PPA I. The PDP was also announced as controlling majority seats in most State

Assembly across the federation. The outcome of the gubernatorial election and state assembly election seemingly reinforces the PDP stronghold of the national political landscape. Apart from only in few states the pre-election status in most states in terms of party dominance and balance of power did not change significantly in the post-election. The ruling-PDP lost the governorship seat in Bauchi state to the ANPP and took control over the governorship seats of the ANPP in Kano and Kebbi states respectively. A further revelation of the election was that some of the states also maintained the voting tradition and pattern, which first manifest during the patently controversial 2003 nationwide elections. Like the 2003 election, the most outrageous figures were recorded from the states such as Rivers in the south-south region. The local populace in several states such as Edo, Ekiti, Oyo, Kaduna and Katsina owing to the general disappointment and dissatisfaction with the announced results of the election embarked on wild protest. Following the deterioration in the orgy of violence over the election led some of the state governments to impose dusk to dawn curfew (Onyemaizu 2007:14).

Amidst the anxiety and tension arising from the conduct and outcome of the State Houses of Assembly and Governorship elections came the April 21 elections held to elect the President and members of the National Assembly comprising 109 in the Senate and 360 in the House of Representatives in all parts of the country. Sequel to the conduct and outcome of the April 14 election there was heightened tension across the country. On April 17 the leaders of about 18 political parties including Abubakar Atiku and Muhammedu Buhari called for the postponement of the Presidential election, disbandment of INEC and cancellation of the April 14 election and they threatened to boycott the April 21 election. The possibility of holding the election was raised with the last minute Supreme Court ruling against the INEC decision of excluding the name of Abubakar Atiku as the presidential candidate of the AC on the ballot paper on the ground of fraud charges against him. Shortly, before the commencement of voting on April 21 there was heightened tension across the country following reports of alleged

attempt to assassinate Good-luck Jonathan, the Vice Presidential candidate and then Governor of Bayelsa state and attempt to destroy the INEC headquarters in Abuja with a struck of bomb. Furthermore, arising from the delay in the commencement of voting due to the late arrival election officials and materials, there were frustration and tension across the country (Onyemaizu 2007:14).

In the conduct of the April 21 election, there was no significant improvement on the lapses that were noticeable in the April 14 elections. Although there was visible presence of heavily armed security personnel at various polling stations, the election was not without hitches. The election was marred by late arrival of electoral materials, ballot box snatching, illegal thumb printing, intimidation and outright violent confrontations. There was low voter turnout and apathy. The election was allegedly rigged in the favour of the ruling-PDP. During the election, the leading political parties budgeted huge sum of money allegedly widely used for the political manipulation voters, the INEC officials, and security agents deployed to provide security in the political process. For instance, it was alleged that one of the leading political parties in certain areas paid each INEC presiding officer at the polling station #3,000 and his clerk #2,000, each policeman #1,000 and about #200 for each voter (Democratic Social Movement (DSM) 2007).

In the elections, the ruling-PDP won majority of the elective seats in the National Assembly and the presidency Democratic Social Movement (DSM) 2007). Here is a summary of the April 24, 2007 presidential election results.

Table 1: Official Results of April 24, 2007 Presidential Election

Name of candidate	Name of party	Vote polled	Percentage
Umoru Yar'Adua	People Democratic Party (PDP)	24,638,063	70%
Muhammadu Burhari	All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP)	6,605,299	18.72
Atiku Abubakar	Action Congress (AC)	2,637,848	7.47
Orji Uzo Kalu	Progressive Peoples Party (PPP)	608,803	1.73
Attahiru Bafarawa	Democratic People Party (DPP)	289,324	0.82
Chukwuemeka O. Ojukwu	All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA)	155,947	0.44
Pere Ajuwa	Alliance For Democracy (AD)	89,241	0.25
Chris Okotie	Fresh Democratic Party (FDP)	74,049	0.21
Patrick Utomi	African Democratic Congress (ADC)	50,849	0.14
Ambrose Owuru	Hope Democratic Party	28,519	0.08
Emmanuel Okereke	African Liberation Party (ALP)	22,677	0.06
Lawrence Adedoyin	African Political System (APS)	22,409	0.06
Habu Fari	National Democratic Party (NDP)	21,934	0.04
Maxi Okwu	Citizens Popular Party (CPP)	14,027	0.03
Barthelomew Naji	Better Nigeria Party (BNP)	11,705	0.02
Emmanuel Obayuwana	National Conscience Party (NCP)	8,229	0.02
Olapade Agoro	National Action Council (NAC)	5,752	0.01
Mojisola Obasanjo	Nigerian Masses Movement (NMM)	4,309	0.01

SOURCE: Nigerian General Election, 2007

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nigerian_general_election,_2007.

The indication from the table shows that the presidential candidate of the ruling-PDP polled 70% of the vote cast to emerge winner (Democratic Social Movement (DSM) 2007). Quite correctly, the opposition parties alleged that the victory of the PDP was obtained not

on conditions of free and fair election. However, the failure of the leading opposition parties can plausibly be explained in several ways. One of such plausible explanations is the reliance of the opposition parties on false strategies such as massive rigging, thuggery and money influence, which tilt in favour of the ruling-PDP which controls the greater public fund and state instrument of coercion and manipulation to beat the PDP. Furthermore, the leading opposition parties had been involved in internal crisis, which left them even more irrelevant than the PDP. Moreover, the opposition parties like the PDP in the last eight years failed to produce any positive example in the few states they controlled that the masses should expect if voted into power.

Nevertheless, the outcome of the election generated dangerous reactions across the country. Leaders of the opposition parties under the platform of the Conference of Nigerian Political Parties (CNPP) the rejected the outcome of the election called for the constitution of Interim National Government of Unity with threat to cause civil unrest on the handover date. Besides, the organized labour and civil society groups rejected and protested against the malpractice, which attended the conduct of the election. On Friday, May 18, 2007 members of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) stayed away from courts and election tribunal in protest over the flaws, which characterize the election (Ise-Oluwa Ige et al 2007:5). The Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) and some civil society groups such as the Campaign for Democracy embarked on protest march in various parts of the country over the malpractice that marred the election.

The coalition comprising seventeen political parties are in the court challenging the outcome of the presidential election (Balogun and Ajakaye 2007: B1&3). The fallout of the flaws and failures of the election was a myriad of petitions at the election tribunals. About 60% of the election results are being contested at the various election tribunals across the country (Access for Credible Election (ACE) 2007). Many of the controversial victories have been reversed, from governorship, House of Assembly, House of Representatives to the Senate. In some,

the tribunal or court called for the immediate installation of the rightful candidates, and in others the re-run. Thus, far, the re-runs such as the Kogi and Ekiti state governorships have not been any better. They were usually marred by flurry of irregularities, malpractices, violence, thuggery, and ballot hijacking and stuffing. There has been lack of change in attitude of the politicians to do or die politics (Anaba & Abdulah 2009).

4.0 Flaws in the Elections since the End of Military Rule

As noted earlier since the end of military rule in 1999, Nigeria has not organized a credible election. To many observers and analysts the nationwide elections in 2003 and 2007 suffered so many shortcomings, which make them perhaps the most controversial election in the nation's political history. INEC that was vested with the responsibility of superintending over the elections displayed low level of competence. The preparation of INEC for the elections since the end of military rule has been shoddy, inadequate and unprofessional (Oshunkeye and A. Orimolade 2003:24). Throughout the 2003 and 2007 nationwide elections lack of secrecy of votes, problem of logistic, shortage of election materials, and late opening of polling have been recurring features. This poor performance formed the basis for which all and sundry have been calling for the reform of INEC if future elections are to be credible and acceptable.

Another pitfall of the post-1999 elections is poor security. During the 2003 elections, INEC offices were also reportedly invaded for ill- conceived intentions. Some electoral officials were allegedly manhandled and stripped of electoral materials. The security arrangement during the elections in the various parts of the country was allegedly lopsided. Moreover, there were cases of police complicity in malpractice, reluctance to intervene in glaring cases of electoral misconduct by some agents (TMG 2003: 27-28). Similarly, in the conduct of the 2007 nationwide election, there was no significant difference in the security arrangement and conduct of the security agencies. As noted

earlier, the presence of heavy security in some polling stations did only little to protect the rights of voters and the integrity of the political process. Political thugs using strong-armed tactics had seemingly unhindered access to electoral materials and unleashed terror.

Gargantuan fraud has also been a major pitfall of the post 1999 nationwide elections. Throughout the 2003 and 2007 nationwide election a flurry of brazen electoral banditry and absurdity has been a noticeable feature. In the 2003 nationwide elections, there were multiple voting and stuffing of ballot boxes in unauthorized locations and private homes. Other irregularities and fraud recorded included ghost voting, under age voting, snatching of ballot boxes and falsification of results. Some electoral officials were alleged of forming part of the scheme for fraudulent practices during the elections (Okomu 2003:18). According to official statement by INEC chairman, “we have also received reports from some of our staff of attempts to compromise their integrity through bribery and other forms of corruption” (INEC 2003). By the same token money and other gift items such as clothes, rice, fish, salt were un-disgustingly used to influence voters days before or on polling day. The observers’ reports in the 2007 nationwide election were not significantly different. The leading political parties were allegedly involved in the use of huge sum of money for political manipulation of voters, the INEC officials and security personnel in the polling stations.

Several explanations can be ascribed for the failure of the elections since the end of military rule in 1999. One of such explanation is the frequent military usurpation of political at the slightest mistakes committed by the politicians and its subsequent prolonged ruler-ship. Through its frequent intervention, the military disrupts the learning process of democratic culture. Thus, whenever the game was restarted the politicians resume “singing old tunes” and “moving old dance steps”. Apart from the disruption of political learning process, the long stay of the military in power saw many Nigerians assimilating the military culture. Oni noted thus “as a people we have become so militarized in our thinking and behaviour such that we believe in the

use of conflict rather than consensus and adjudication methods” (Oni 2001:8) This judgment is aptly applies in the respective elections since the end of military rule. The attitudinal and behavioural patterns of the politicians were militaristic. This manifests in their pronouncements and deployment of violence before, during and after the elections.

Another reason that can be adduced for the failure of the elections since the end of military rule is the character of the Nigerian state, which places high premium on politics. The power structure of the Nigerian state bestows on those who control state power easy access to wealth and social aggrandizement. By this character couple with its lack of adequate investments, the state becomes the only contested terrain. Elections into public offices serve as the only opportunity to acquiring state power and the mobilization of its the resources. Thus, the political contest is perceived as do or die affairs, case of dog eat dog and notoriously intense. As Obasanjo noted, “the electioneering has meant times of heightened passion for individuals as well as groups and communities who push for victory. A large number of people come out of election feeling hurt. Regrettably, there had been physical wounds and even death” (Koko 2003). Drawing a similar concern Olurode (Not Dated) remarked that to win an elective office is like running a life long fortune as every stage of the electoral process such as votes registration, polling, vote counting and announcement has always been a war to finish. Clearly, Olurode’s comment aptly captures the political behaviour of the politicians at the various stages in the electoral process since the exit of the military from political power in 1999. The politicians relied on unconventional democratic behaviour including recruitment of thugs and use of armed tactics, violence, and assassinations at every stage in the 2003 and 2007 elections respectively to gain electoral victory.

The overwhelming power structure of the state makes failure in political contest hard to contemplate. Failure in the political contest means losing everything (material and moral benefits) associated with the control of power (Ake 1993). This political equation manifests itself

in intolerance distrust, fanaticism and unwillingness to compromise or accept defeat (Diamond 1988). In the same vein, due to the high stake of the state power those who control state apparatuses manipulate them in order to retain political offices. As was the case with the nationwide elections in the first and second republics, in the elections since the end of military rule the power of incumbency has arrogantly been used to manipulate state agencies such as the INEC and security agencies including the police, SSS, EFCC and ICPC for the purpose of retaining power and ensuring the election of preferred candidates into political offices.

5.0 Implications of the Elections for Democratic Practice

So far the elections held since the exit of the military from political power in 1999 have been acclaimed locally and internationally to be manifestly fraught with flaws and fraud. The courts and election petition tribunal ruling on most of the cases confirmed the flurry of massive and the gargantuan electoral arbitrariness, which characterized the elections. Instructively, though the courts and election tribunals have raised hope for electoral democratic practice, the issues and incidents the elections have generated portend grave dangers now and in the future.

One of the fallouts of the elections since the end of military rule in 1999 is that they bestow in majority of those government mandate without popular support of the citizens. Thus, the post-military elections tell a story of the moral depravity with the disenfranchisement of many Nigerians owing to unconventional electoral conduct before, during and after the elections. Consequently, there is the possibility that the people would hardly accept the government as neither legitimate nor accord it any support. Thus, there is the likelihood that the electoral brigandage could result in the radicalization of violence and revolutionary struggles against the government. On another plane, there is the possibility that there would be massive electoral apathy on the part of the voters.

On the other hand, those who the gargantuan flaws and frauds, which fraught the election have benefited may continue to rely on them in future elections. Although the courts and electoral tribunals have reversed some of the electoral flaws and frauds, the conditions and institutions and agencies, which were contributory to the electoral arbitrariness, are yet to be reformed.

Another scenario that can be constructed from the character of the post-military elections is the likelihood of severely overheating the polity and distracting the attention of the elected or selected leaders from state official duties. As noted earlier, over 56% of the 2003 election results were challenged in courts many of which were resolved in few months to the conduct of the 2007 election. In the 2007 election, over 60% of the 2007 election results are being contested in courts. Apparently, there is the likelihood that the welfare and living standard of the ordinary citizen would further deteriorate in the years ahead.

Furthermore, the conduct and character of the elections since the end of military rule in 1999 have and would unimaginably continue to threaten social order and internal security of Nigeria. As noted earlier the conduct of the elections since the end of military rule in Nigeria have resulted in the proliferation of private militias and sophisticated dangerous weapons. With the emergence of private-militias and proliferation of dangerous arms in the hands of thugs used during the election, there is the possibility that such weapons may be retained by them and could be used to perpetrate horrendous social vices such as youth gangsterism, restiveness, terrorism, criminality, robbery and assassinations. In the scenario, where the Nigerian State is fast losing monopoly of instrument of violence to thugs and private-militias there is the possibility that if future elections are not well managed the nascent democracy could be truncated and the country may drift into anarchy.

6.0 Conclusion

This paper examined the elections in Nigeria since the end of military rule in 1999. The paper revealed that the elections have been fundamentally flawed and fraudulent. The net effect of the elections is a myriad of electoral and social problems hunting the country. The governments formed at various levels across the country on the basis of the elections have been seriously enmeshed in deep legitimacy crisis. Thus, the nation has largely remained in limbo since the end of military rule due to the inability of the civilian government to conduct successful election. The only institution sustaining the nascent democracy is the judiciary. No doubt the judicial pronouncements and rulings on some of the elections have raised the audacity of Nigerians to hope for better elections in the years ahead. By design or default, the election tribunals have nullified some of the elections and there is the possibility that many more may follow in times ahead. Unless the Appeal Courts upturn the verdicts of the election tribunals the implication is that fresh poll will be conducted in such elective offices.

However, out of a feeling of insecurity, many of the ruling-governors in most states are in a hurry to plant their stooges as vassals in the local government councils by organizing infamy council polls so as to gain a head start in the event that fresh elections are called. This presupposes that the mere nullification of the elections is not enough. It does not change the mindset of the beneficiaries of electoral fraud. In Nigeria, the elected political executives are hardly held accountable. Since politics is the quickest gateway to wealth and self-aggrandizement the mere nullification of their elections may not serve as strong disincentive to the desperate political officers. Thus, there is the possibility that any re-run election may not be better than the earlier elections.

The question then is what practical steps need be taken to ensure a true electoral contest in Nigeria in the future. First, there is the need for the judiciary to take further steps such as treating the beneficiaries and his conspirators as criminals. Any person found to

have benefited from election manipulation should be made to refund the financial benefits that may have accrued to such impostors. Furthermore, the incumbent political officers found guilty of electoral manipulations should be treated as a criminal and disqualified from participating in the re-run election that may subsequently follow. Secondly, there is the need to re-examine the structure of power of the Nigerian state with a view to create auspicious conditions for an engagement in a genuine democratic order. This can be done through a constitutional conference, which would involve all the stakeholders in the Nigerian state. Furthermore, the operations of all state institutions such as the INEC, Police, SSS and EFCC need to be re-examined and overhauled with a view to enhance their effectiveness and efficiency in compliance with the minimum requirements of an engagement in a truly free and fair election. Finally, if the desired true election can take root there the need for the politicians should have attitudinal change. They learn to respect the rules of the games. They should allow themselves to be guided by the axiom, "he who fights and run away lives to fight another day".

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