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Election Fraud and Political Stability in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

TSUWA, John Tor; AGAIGBE, Mercy Faeren and SHAIBUME, Benjamin

Abstract

This paper interrogates the impact of election fraud on political stability in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The paper adopted secondary means of data collection for the study. Liberal theory of democracy was adopted for analysis. The paper argued that political instability in Nigeria since 1999 to date is as a result of lack of free, fair and credible elections. Credible, free and fair elections can help in consolidating democratic values, promote human rights and security. But fraudulent elections promote political instability, corruption and conflict in the polity. In view of the above scenario, the paper therefore recommended that concerted effort should be put in place for the introduction of new technology into our electoral process. There is every need by INEC to further deploy technology in other areas of the electoral process, especially in results tabulation and transmission, in online voters' registration and even in piloting electronic voting, godfatherism should be discouraged, political parties and politicians should play the game of politics according to its rules, security agents must be professional and well trained for the roles they are supposed to play before, during and after elections among others to enhance political stability in Nigeria.

Keywords: Election, fraud, rigging, violence, democracy, Political Stability.

Introduction

In liberal democratic theory, an election is a viable mechanism for perfecting representative government and voting is the main form of political participation in a democratic societies. Globally, credible elections constitute a major factor in democracy and good governance. Election in democracies helps to promote representation of popular will and to secure legitimacy of the political system (Tonwe, Aihie and Igiebor, 2014). The electoral system of any country plays a fundamental role in sustaining and molding the political behavior of its citizens (Okolo, 2002). The way elections are conducted in a country determines to a great extent the level of political culture, political participation and governance in the country. This obviously depends on the effectiveness and efficiency of a country's electoral system.

Since democracy means rule by the people, people are supposedly able to choose leaders whom they want to represent their interest in government through elections even though it is usually difficult to hold elections that are completely free and fair. However, conducting elections have been the major bane confronting African democracies. Studies on elections show that transiting from one regime to another is often the problem in most African states (Ogundiya and Aba, 2005; Glasgow and Alvarez, 2005; Falana, 2009).

The manifestation of violence before, during and after elections often brings about instability in the political system of most African states including Nigeria which is ignited by fraudulent elections. The conduct of elections has always been characterized by pessimism or uncertainty inconclusive and fears for the safety of lives and properties. It is based on the foregoing ugly scenarios that this paper seek to interrogate the incidence of election fraud and political stability in Nigeria particularly in the Fourth Republic 1999 to date.

Conceptual Clarifications

The Concept of Election Fraud: According Kurfi (2005:101) election fraud is the manipulation of the electoral process to the advantage of a particular candidate or political party which can be perpetuated at any level of the electoral process from the delimitation of the constituencies to the adjudication of election disputes and that even the promulgation of the electoral law could be subject to abuse by partisan administration or bureaucracy as witnessed during the enactment of electoral act 2001 and 2002. This elections manipulation remains inevitable without the connivance of election participants such as: candidates, polling agents, security agents, polling clerks, election/returning officers, presiding officers and the electorate at large.

The objectives of election fraud are mainly to frustrate the democratic aspiration of citizens who have voted, or would have voted into office someone other than the rigged individual. Ibrahim (2007) identified these forms of election fraud in Nigeria thus:

Compilation of fictitious names on voters registers, illegal compilation of separate voters' list, abuses of the voter registration revise exercise, illegal printing of voters cards, illegal possession of ballot boxes, stuffing of ballot boxes with ballot papers, falsification of election results, illegal thumb-printing of ballot papers, under aged voting, illegal printing of the forms used for collation and declaration of election results, deliberate refusal to supply election materials to certain areas, announcing results in places where no elections were held, unauthorized announcement of elections results, harassment of candidates, agents and voters, change of list of electoral officials and ballot box-switching and inflation of figures.

- In the context of Nigeria, election rigging is an act or conduct of subverting the entire electoral process through massive organized fraud to take over governmental affairs in violation of section 1 of the 1999 and 1979 constitutions (Umar, 2013).

The Concept of Political Stability: Political stability is closely linked to the prevention of conflict and the promotion of peace. Generally, the concept of political stability comprehends the following scope of meanings and nuances:

The absence of violence, government longevity, the existence of a legitimate constitutional regime, absence of structural change, and, a multifaceted societal attribution (Hurwitz, 1973).

More conventionally, political stability entails the absence of domestic civil conflict and violent behavior. Hence, a stable polity is seen as a peaceful, law-abiding society where decision making and politico-societal change are the result of institutionalized and functional procedures and not the outcome of anomic processes which resolve issues through conflict and aggression (Hurwitz, 1973: 449). To Osaghae (1995) political stability whether in democracy or quasi democracy, could not be pursued for its own sake. In the circumstances of developing countries, what was (and still) more important is good government that responds positively to the demands and expectations of the people. He further asserts that, only a government that performs well can be stable, if what sustains it in power is voluntary support or consent of the citizens. Simply put, political stability *means* the prevalence of peace, political order and sustainable progress in a polity over a period of time. It is characterized by amiable civil relations and peaceful socio-political change that forecloses systemic variability, uncertainty, volatility, insecurity, disequilibrium and flux.

Theoretical Framework

The liberal theory of democracy presents us with a heuristic tool for interrogating the central issues of this paper. The liberal theory of democracy is

said to be common among capitalist and peripheral capitalist nations. This notion of democracy emerged when capitalism became the dominant mode of production in Europe and North America supported by the philosophical writing of John Locke, J.J Rousseau, John Stuart Mill, Montesquieu and other liberal writers whose theories advocate private liberty, natural rights, social justice, majority rule and private property (Odhiambo, 2007). Based on this premise, basic features of liberal democratic theory are:

- a. Acceptance of capitalism,
- b. Free, fair and periodic elections based on universal franchise,
- c. Emphasis on civil liberties or individual rights such as freedom of speech, assembly, press and religion,
- d. Competitive party system as oppose to one party system,
- e. Pressure groups,
- f. Rule of law,
- g. Separation of powers and checks and balances,
- h. Abhorrence of revolutionary approach to change the government (Ahimbola and Adesota, 2012).

The central idea of the liberal theory of democracy is how to design a political system which encourages individual participation and enhances moral development of citizens. According to Ahimbola and Adesota (2012:2), in a liberal democracy, electoral process always gives room for the formation of groups popularly called political parties which are expected to possess some basic characteristics like political ideology, sincere political manifestoes, party discipline, and strong internal democracy among others. Thus, competition among these political parties is seen as part and parcel of democracy because it helps to strengthen the quality and level of their service to the people. This is why electoral scholars like Agbaje (2006) and Omotola (2007) in Adesota and Ahimbola (2014:13) among others often argued that the significance of free and fair elections as a critical element of democracy cannot be over stated.

Liberal democracies usually have universal suffrage, granting all adult citizens the right to vote regardless of race, gender or property ownership. Liberal democracy may take the various constitutional forms: It may be a Federal Republic, as the United States, Brazil, India and Germany, or constitutional Monarchy such as the United Kingdom, Japan or Spain. It may also be a presidential or parliamentary system.

This theory is justified due to the fact that, it can help examine analytically the challenges of sustaining Nigerian democracy or democratic stability in Nigeria's Fourth Republic as it designs the systematic structure through which a democratic political system can effectively function. Liberal theory of democracy is an interesting theory in this work. Its value lies in the fact that it exposes and explains the expectation of any political system, especially as it

emphasize the conduct of credible elections which is one of the factors responsible for an enduring legitimacy and political stability.

Election fraud and Political (in) Stability in Nigeria

Election is a part of the democratic framework in the society that if properly put to use, will produce socio-economic and political development. For a democratic political system to have enduring legitimacy and stability, the election process must be widely perceived as free, fair and transparent (Adewuyi, 2014). When elections are credible, free and fair, they can help promote democracy, human rights and security. But when elections are fraudulent, they can trigger political instability and even violence (Annan, 2012). This means that for democracy to fulfill its potential as a means of peacefully resolving social and political conflict, the integrity of elections is crucial. For Allen (2005), elections are considered important aspects of democracy, not only because of their role in determining succession but as a basis for legitimacy and ensuring accountability and good governance from political parties that form government. This in the views of Ball (1990), legitimize the status quo and further produces a degree of political stability which political leaderships usually seek.

Despite the vital place that election holds in democracy in this 21st century, the organization of free and fair elections remains a real challenge for new democracies in West Africa, particularly Nigeria (Reynolds, 2009; Humkpe & Gueye, 2010). In Africa, years of economic exploitation, mal-development and bad governance have continued to fan the ember of conflicts and crises in the continent. From Togo to democratic republic of Congo, Nigeria to Kenya and Zimbabwe to Ivory Coast, and Gambia general elections have been widely disputed and the recent annulled presidential election in Kenya by the supreme court which could have course civil unrest in the country further confirmed the fraudulent activities of politicians towards elections in Africa. Evidence has shown that in the whole of African continent, only few states could lay claim to have genuinely conducted free and fair elections that were universally accepted.

In Nigeria, the elections conducted since independence have been played in a do or die affair, the campaigns proceeding elections are in variably marked by pettiness, intolerance and violence (Fagbehun, 2013). With particular reference to the political crisis of 1964-1966, Ojo (2012:6) identified electioneering as one of the critically culpable factors. In his words, "pre and post-election violence in the defunct western Region created unprecedented political instability" in Nigeria. Violence has become synonymous with Nigeria's political culture such that virtually all elections held so far in the country are violence - ridden. Between 1960 and 2015, Nigeria had conducted nine general elections and several other elections at regional and state levels. The general elections were held in 1964, 1979, 1983, 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019. A survey of the political history of post-independence Nigeria shows that none of these

elections was conducted in an atmosphere of appreciable electoral security, which partly informed the collapse of the previous three Republics and subsequent intervention of the military in Nigeria's political life. Empirical evidence has shown that in elections conducted to public offices, all contesting parties are involved in one form of electoral malpractices or other (Joseph, 1987; Iwu, 2008).

In fact, the elections conducted in Nigeria have been cruelly contested that the success of the democratic order has been compromised. Many commentators and election observers argued that the 2007 election conducted in Nigeria was the worst since the history of elections in Nigeria. However, they were just fast to make this statement as they did not wait to assess the outcome of the 2019 general election in Nigeria and the subsequent November 16th 2019 election in Kogi and Bayelsa states which were characterized with election irregularities, snatching of ballot boxes, violence, compromise by the INEC officials, police and other security agents, killings, sporadically shootings by thugs or what they described as fake police, vote buying, intimidation of voters and candidate of oppositions party among others. In fact this is so far the worst election in the history of elections in Nigeria. It laughable to attest that thugs or fake police overpowered 66,493 police deployed to Kogi and Bayelsa states to make sure elections were violence free.

Historicity of Election fraud in Nigeria

The First Republic; The First republic was not devoid of conflicts that dovetailed into political assassinations and violence, this occurs in the context of group struggles to seek, hold or maintain power (Anifowose, 1982) Prior to the 1966 coup, there was the 1964 General elections which was alleged to be fraught with gross irregularities. The expression of discontentment to the election resulted in civil uprising and political brouhaha, killings and reprisal attacks. It is imperative to note that political violence associated with election and electoral processes in Nigeria commenced with the 1959 federal elections designed by British to facilitate the transition from colonial rule to independence (Ogundiya and Baba, 2005). Anifowose (1982:56) argue that the 1959 elections were fraught with violence and intimidation of political opponents, stuffing of ballot boxes and wanton destruction of lives and properties. The proximate cause of violence was the defeat of Action Group party in the contest and, subsequently, declaration of emergency rule in western region by the federal government of Nigeria in 1962. This was in addition to the existing feud in Action Group (AG) which ended in the deposition of Chief S.L Akintola, the premier of the defunct western region, from office. These electoral conflicts heightened tensions among party loyalists and eventually led to the imprisonment of Obafemi Awolowo and Anthony Enahoro, among others on charges of treasonable felony in 1963 (Okoli and Iortyer, 2014).

The 1964 federal elections and 1965 western regional elections were maiden post-independence electoral processes that also recorded unprecedented crises. Anifowose (1982:62) argued that the mayhem of 1964 was based on the desire to control the center between Northern People's Congress (NPC), Action group (AG), the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons (later known as the National Council of the Nigeria Citizens) (NCNC) and the Nigeria National Democratic Party (NNDP). The desire to win elections at all cost culminated into stiff competition between the parties and the emergence of United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) and Nigeria National Alliance (NNA). The political maneuvers that followed led to series of attacks, counter attacks and assassinations of perceived political opponents.

The political tension and crisis associated with the 1964 elections among other factors eventually pave way to military intervention in 1966. For instance, Kurfi (1983:24) argues that the carnage, irregularities and controversies surrounding the 1964 and 1965 elections were responsible for the collapse of the first republic. Following a protracted military rule that lasted for thirteen years, the Murtala/Obasanjo regime carried out a transition program and returned the country to civil rule in 1979.

The Second Republic; The second republic of 1979 came with five registered political parties, Great Nigeria People's Party (GNPP), National Party of Nigeria (NPN), Nigeria People's Party (NPP), People's Redemption Party (PRP), Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) and later Nigeria Advance Party (NAP) which participated in the 1983 general election. The 1979 election was the second immediate testing ground for democracy after a thirteen-year military administration which lasted from 1966-1979. The 1979 general elections recorded minimal chaos except that some cases of Violence were reported in some cases as a result of the fact that some parts of the country were aggrieved at the outcome of the election. The major contending issue was that of 2/3 of 19 states which was resolved in favour of Alhaji Shehu Shagari, NPN Presidential candidate, by the Supreme Court (Alfa and Otaida, 2012:46). In contradiction to the scenario in 1979, the 1983 election were manipulated through the incumbency influence of the Shagari, regime. The incumbent government won using a tremendous rigging and violence like was in the first republican elections and this eventually gave the military a fertile ground to overthrow the civilian government on 31 December, 1983.

However, 1979 election brought some relief as regards to how freer it was, comparing with 1964/1965 elections but 1983 election uttered the rewarding standards set by 1979 election. To support this argument, Tijani (1986:15) notes: A massive collusion involving the NPN, the FEDECO (The Federal Electoral Commission), the public and some section of the Judiciary had produced governments that could not claim legitimacy by dint of even the most

rudimentary requirement of a bourgeois democracy. Pointing the level of fraudulent the election was, Kurfi (2005) notes: All sorts of strategies and stratagems including manipulation of the ballot or "rigging" were employed in order to win election.

The Third Republic: The third Republic witnessed a prolonged Military rule with unending transition programme which never came to fruition. The military democratic transition necessitated the establishment of National Electoral Commission (NECON) and a two party structure; the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and National Republican Convention (NRC) based on the recommendations of the political Bureau of 1986, until its dissolutions in 1993, NECON Conducted Local Government elections, 1991 Gubernatorial and National Assembly elections and 1993 presidential elections. The 1993 election was adjudged by transition monitoring groups as the freest and fairest elections Nigeria has ever in her chequered political history produced (Okoli and Iortyer, 2014:8). Sadly, however; the Ibrahim Babangida regime annulled the election which was presumed to have been won by Moshood Abiola of the SDP, apparently to satisfy primordial group interest.

The annulment of this election result threatened the political stability and unity of Nigeria and pushed the country back to deep seated political turmoil and further military authoritarianism. Amidst tension that gripped the country resulting from political instability that emanated from the winner of the said election who threatened mutiny if not given mandate in an election he won with great margin, General Ibrahim Babangida stepped aside and handed over the government to an interim government led by Chief Ernest Shonekan but this was a mere gimmick to usher in another military government as General Babangida's second in command. General Sani Abacha dethroned the interim government and ruled until he died in power.

The Fourth Republic; The Fourth Republic was ushered in by the 1999 federal elections after years of military rule. As a result of the tortuous clamour for democratic governance which was stifled by Babangida and Abacha's regimes' protracted transition programs, the ability of Adulsalami Abubakar to put in place a brief transition time table and actualized his promises filled the political air with excitement and euphoria. However, the conduct of free, fair and credible periodic elections by an unbiased electoral body including its empire as well as other electoral officials and the adherence to democratic principles of governance remain major factors responsible for the avoidance of electoral violence in Nigeria.

Since the birth of the fourth republic in 1999, elections have never differed from the previous ones conducted. The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistant (IDEA) (2001:217) emphasized that the process of election in Nigeria are characterized by stuffing of ballot boxes with papers, over-bloating of voting registers, special treatment of voters, disappearance

of/or destruction of ballot boxes as well as distortion or doctoring of election results, and that electoral malpractice had become an entrenched practice in Nigerian political system. The designation of the national electoral umpire changed from NECON to Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC); yet the change did not alter her attitude towards the conduct of free and fair elections. Political parties were allegedly involved in massive rigging, as well as use of thugs to harass opponents through active connivance with security agents. At worst, the ruling elite resorted to using judicial tribunals to unjustifiably uphold their elections (IDEA, 2001:217). Flawed polls (or elections) affect political stability (Oxford Analytical, 2007). It can transform into violence.

The 1999 elections did not engender much violence chiefly because the Nigerian public was tired of Military dictatorship and thus was desperate to see a form of democratic transition materialize. The 1999 general election came up with three political parties; People's Democratic Party (PDP), All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP), and the Alliance for Democracy (AD), ANPP and AD came into alliance and fronted Chief Olu Falae who competed with PDP flag bearer, former Military Head of State, chief Olusegun Obasanjo. Obasanjo, who also come from Yoruba, did not attract support from his people because he was picked by the military to run for the election. This made his people accused him of representing the interest of the military oligarchy. The South-West rather rallied support for Olu Falae but Obasanjo later emerged the winner in an election that was seen as a mirage and as a result was not taken serious (Nwokeke and Jayum, 2011:135). The lackadaisical attitude shown towards the election by Nigerians gave the military Junta the free hand to manipulate the election and handed power to the person the hierarchy wanted.

Given the weak proceedings to the fourth republic, subsequent elections could not help the manifestation of another round of electoral Violence. In 2003 another general election was conducted; this was adjudged by international observers as the worst election ever conducted in Nigeria political history. According to Ajayi in Nachana'a, Yusuf and Auwalu (2014:13), opposition political parties, international election observers, local monitors and pro-democracy groups adjudged the 2003 elections as lacking in transparency and fairness. Okoosi-simbine (2004) in Nachana'a, et al (2014:12), also observed that during the 2003 elections, several of the parties pursued practices which could be said to help undermine the chances of peaceful and well-run elections. Ugoh (2004), confirms this observation and particularly noted several cases of politically motivated killings. No part of the country including Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) was exempted from various dimensions of electoral violence before, during and after election periods. In the north-central states of Nigeria especially Benue, plateau, Kogi and Nasarawa States, Tsav in Okoli and Iortyer (2014) posits that there were various degrees of electoral violence unleashed on Nigerians. In Benue state, for instance, Tarka, Gwer,

Gboko, Buruku, Kwande, Ukum, Otukpo, and Guma local government areas (LGAs) experienced the worst forms of election crisis. Some of the violence took place during the primaries of political parties in 2002 (African Action, 2003). In Kwande LGA where soldiers were dispatched to the area to guarantee security allegedly opened fire on ANPP supporters on April 2003 killing over 20 of them (Human Rights watch, 2004).

Fwatshak and Larad (2007:268) point out some victims of political assassinations within the period to include: Theodore Agwato (principal secretary to Imo state governor) Mr. and Mrs. Igwe (Onitsha branch chairman of Nigeria Bar Association and his wife), Jibola Olanipekun (former commissioner in Oyo State), Harry Marshall (ANPP national chairman South-South), Aminassori Dikibo (PDP South-South national chairman) Eze Odumegwu Okonkwo (Chairman Nnewi, South LGA of Anambra state), Philip Oluruniya (Kogi State chairman, SINEC) and Funso Williams (Governorship aspirant PDP Lagos) thus, high profile politicians and statesmen as well as innocent members of the public, including minors have continued to fall victims of the ever increasing electoral violence across the country from one state to the other, there have been gory accounts of events including bloody clashes, killing and arson, vandalism, abduction intimidation, victimization, propaganda and character assassination.

The declining quality of Nigerian elections is increasingly seen as a threat to democratic consolidation. The 2007 general elections were the third in the series that map Nigeria's democratization since 1999. The elections offered another opportunity for change and power turnover in the country. However, judging by the overall quality and outcomes of the elections, the expectations of many Nigerians and international partners were dashed. The elections were marred by massive irregularities as reported by different accredited election observers like the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), Carter Centre (CC), National Democratic Institute (NDI), International Republican Institute (IRI) and EU EOMS (Nwangwu, 2005). In his part, Igbokwe (2009:1) is of the view that nowhere is the failure of the democracy project more pronounced than in the conduct of elections. The three general elections held under the present democracy were acts that shamed and mocked democracy. He argue further that:

What is more, the proceeding elections always turn out better than the ones held thereafter, Thus, while the 1999 arranged elections were deemed better than the 2003 vote allocation, the 2007 farcical charade that drew worldwide opprobrium remains the topping to deliberate electoral frauds that were committed to preserve the most audacious and corrupt wing of what passes as the country's political class in power (Igbokwe, 2009).

The 2007 general elections were described as the most rigged in the history of Nigeria as almost all the rules that guide the process of elections were violated

with impunity by electoral criminals and political scavengers within the polity. In the build up to 2007 general elections, there were indications that the exercise was going to be fraught with rigging and other forms of malpractices (Ojo and Ademowo 2015:9). For instance general Olusegun Obasanjo was widely quoted as declaring during electioneering campaigns that the 2007 election was going to be a do-or-die affair. In reality, the 2007 general elections were inundated with another round of malpractices, which informed yet another round of electoral violence across the country. For instance the IFES-Nigeria collected, documented and reported different incidences of electoral violence in Nigeria, and thus put the total at 967, which include 13 deaths from January 13 to April 30, 2007 (IFES- Nigeria, 2007). The human rights watch also highlighted incidence of pre-electoral violence in the run-up to Nigeria's April 2007 elections which was beset by political killings, bombings and armed clashes between supporters of rival political factions (HumanRight Watch, 2007). The former governor of Anambra State, Dr. Chukuemeka Ezeife, while commenting generally on the status of democracy in Nigeria as in Adeyemo(2009), he opined that:

...Democracy is associated with elections. How was the elections conducted since 1999 till date? The 1999 election were disputed but it was vastly better than the 2003 elections. People shouted foul about the 2003 election but that was infinitely better than the non- election of 2007. Each election has been worse, more flawed than the one before it. We cannot continue like this if want to get our democracy right.

Late President Umaru Yar Adua also at his inaugural speech admitted that the 2007 general elections that brought him to power was flawed (Abimbola and Adesote, 2012).

The 2011 elections conducted by INEC under its chairman professor Jega was applauded by both local and international observers of being credible and transparent. But the conduct of the 2011 elections was not without some challenges before, during and after the election (Nachana'a, et al 2014). These challenges were among others, the problem associated with the PDP zoning formula that became the most contentious and candidacy of president Jonathan, rampant cases of underage registration and voting: Ad-hoc INEC officials who resisted the pressure to register minors and allow them vote were threatened and harassed into submission; cases of ballot box snatching in spite of the open/secret system of voting as well as multiple thumb printing, the use of palm carnal to thumb print despite the capturing machine that were used electronically; 60% of polling units were unable to receive materials and also accusation of outright fraud and collation amongst INEC agents (Nachana'a et al, 2014). The 2011 elections just like the previous ones was associated with violence of increased intensity and magnitude, posing deadly threats to the survival of the emerging democracy in the fourth republic.

The announcement of the results of 2011 presidential election sparked up violent demonstration in some Northern states of the country. Following the declaration of President Goodluck Jonathan as the winner of the election, people believed to be supporters of opposition; Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), burst into violent uprising unleashing terror and destroyed properties worth millions of Naira (Alfa and Otaida, 2012:48). The house of the Vice President, Namadi Sambo was looted and raised and palaces of prominent traditional rulers in the north were attacked. A number of members of National Youth Service Corps were killed in mayhem in Bauchi, Gombe among others (Eu, Eom 2011 in Alfa and Otaida 20 12:48). Also in Kaduna state, in reaction to INEC's declaration of Dr. Goodluck Jonathan, PDP candidate as the winner of the Presidential Election, the then Inspector General of Police (IG) Hafix Ringim. Confirmed that 518 people, including six (6) police officers were killed in the post-Election violence that beclouded the state (Alfa and Otaida, 2014).

The 2015 general election was the fifth general elections since the country's return to democratic rule in 1999. Concerned about the massive electoral fraud witnessed in the past general elections in Nigeria, INEC deployment of the Card Reader in 2015 general elections was to ensure a credible, transparent, free and fair election in order to deepen Nigeria's electoral process. However, the use of the electronic device in the 2015 general elections generated mixed views of Nigerians on the credibility of the election. INEC assessment however revealed that the elections were peaceful and orderly in many parts of the country. Some states nevertheless recorded significant cases concerning under age voting in the Northern part and inflated figures in the some states like Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Enugu, Kano, Sokoto, Kaduna and Delta States (European Union Election Observation Mission (EUEOM), 2015 in Onapajo, 2015). This also includes a few cases of ballot snatching - with the aid of security officers in a number of states. For example, in Akwa Ibom State supporters of the opposition party (APC) protested over perceived irregularities in the state elections calling for the outright cancellation of the elections (Udo, 2015).

A number of violent incidents were also observed, the most affected being Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Ebonyi and Ondo states (Ndujihe and Kurnolu, 2015). According to them, INEC's records show that there were 66 reports of violent incidents targeted at polling units, the commission's officials, voters and election materials. There were in Rivers state (16 incidents), Ondo (8), Cross River and Ebonyi (6 each), Akwa Ibom (5), Bayelsa (4), Lagos and Kaduna (3 each), Jigawa, Enugu, Ekiti and Osun (2 each), Katsina, Plateau, Kogi, Abia, Imo, Kano and Ogun (1 each) (Ndujihe and Kurnolu, 2015). They further confirmed that, allegation of wide rigging continued to trail the outcome of elections in Akwa Ibom state, the APC, called attention to cases of ballot snatching, organized violence, withholding of sensitive electoral materials among other anomalies during the presidential and national assembly as well as the governorship elections in the state. Despite the mixed views of Nigerians on

the credibility, the 2015 election seems better than the four previous elections on malpractices and controversy.

The history of general elections in Nigeria has been characterized by widespread malpractices and violence. According to Udu, Nkwede and Ezekwe (2015:209), elections in Nigeria have been associated with irregularities and violence since the Fourth Republic. It has become the menu of manipulation because since 1999, the outcome of elections in the country have scarcely reflected the will of the voters due to the avalanche of electoral malpractices experienced in the process (Suberu, 2007 and Oddih, 2007). Jega (2007:255) asserts that, since the return to civil rule in May 1999, the country has witnessed more violence with an estimated loss of life of more than 10,000 people mostly during the period of elections.

Factors Preventing the Conduct of Credible, Free and Fair Elections in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

The administration of the electoral process in Nigeria has been far from satisfactory. Some of the factors responsible for lack of free and fair elections in Nigeria include:

The Nature and Character of the State; Social Science literature is replete with several strands of thoughts and explanations on the persisting and deepening incidence of electoral fraud in Nigeria's body politics, however, this explanation appears to melt in the boiling pot of the character and parasitic nature of the Nigerian state. The state power in Nigeria has largely been used as an instrument of personal, sectional, class or primordial agenda (Okolie, 2005:434). The immensity of state power and its proneness to abuse with impunity had in the past ruled out a politics of moderation and mandated a politics of lawlessness and extremism, for the simple reason that the nature of state makes the state power irresistibly attractive. Indeed, the spate of electoral violence in Nigeria's electoral process is largely a product for the political leadership to use the instrument of the state to commit acts of criminality and unmitigated electoral fraud resulting in the imposition of unpopular and unelected candidates on the people (Okolie, 2005).

Weak Institutional Framework; The weakness of some key institutions and architectures associated with democratic culture and practice also account for the progressive intensity of electoral violence in Nigeria. For instance, the electoral body, (INEC), the police and the judiciary have always been alleged of playing politics with their respective constitutional and statutory responsibilities in terms of unequal representation of the interests of the political parties at one time or the other. Specifically within the current dispensation, these institutions are severally indicted of complicity with the ruling party at the centre (Ojo and Adernowo, 2015:12). For instance, INEC is the most important institution in Nigeria's present democratization in terms of electoral administration because of

its sensitive assignment, which includes the registration of political parties and the monitoring of their financial activities but more importantly the conduct of elections for various political offices. These include the supervision of party primaries and the actual conduct of general elections. However, INEC's performance in all of these functions since 1999 has been abysmal (Yagboyaju, 2011).

Accordingly, while the main role of the police during an election is to protect life and property, to preserve electoral law, to prevent and detect electoral crime, to maintain order and to create, by means of effective policing, a favourable climate in which a democratic election can take place. An assessment of electoral security in Nigeria's democracy since the beginning of the Fourth Republic in 1999, indicate that the public is wary of the security personnel ... who have turned in to small gods aiding and abetting electoral irregularities in the country (Chukwurna, 2001; Idowu, 2010 and National Democratic Institute, 2012 in Oni, Chidozie and Agbude, 2013:7). To Hounkpe and Gueye, (2010), the poor skills and irrationality by which the police performs these functions have however often led to loss of life, injuries and destruction of property as the police conduct has always catalyzed instead of diluting chaos.

Huge Salary and Remuneration Attached to Public Offices; As a result of the huge salary attached with both executive and legislative elective positions in Nigeria, those who find their way into this public offices find it extremely hard to relinquish power as they become acclimatized with the financial rewards and other privileges that come with their office (Chris, 2016). For instance, the take home of a local government councilor is outrageous, to say nothing of the state representatives and senators. The high salaries and other remuneration which make politicians super-rich also make it difficult for them to let go if they lose at the polls. This is why electoral contest in Nigeria become a do-or-die affair.

Systematic Corruption; Nigeria has not been able to have foolproof election due to the corruptive nature of some Nigerians. This has for a very long time find its way into all areas of Nigeria's political and socio-economic systems (Chris, 2016). This made it easy for an election official to collect money from a political party, candidate or their agents for the purpose of altering the outcome of an election. Even the voters are given money in exchange for their votes. In some cases, the election officials or the voters themselves demand for bribe. The consequences of this are the flaw of the whole electoral process.

The Power of Incumbency in Nigeria

The power of incumbency in Nigeria still remains a large factor in the determination of election outcomes. All state apparatus and even the state treasury are employed to ensure the return of the incumbent government, even in the situation whereby the **incumbent leader is to vacate his post** after spending the maximum term in office, the person will do all within his power to ensure the election of the candidate on the platform of his political party

Nnamani, (2014:84). This is achieved by using the media, the security agencies, and all other resources in his disposal. The sad scenarios of 2011 elections indicates that almost all the serving governors designed ways to muscle out opposition in their respective areas of jurisdiction. The intense heat led to loss of lives and properties roping opponents into political crimes.

Godfatherism; In Nigeria, political godfathers control the parties at local and national levels (Human Right Watch, 2007 and Omobowale and Olanrewaju, 2007). These godfathers select the delegates who elect party leaders and candidates through control of the delegates; they decide who gets the party's nomination and leadership positions. The activities of these godfathers create so much dissatisfaction in the political process because they disregard formal procedures for party nomination of candidates. The insurgence of godfathers into Nigeria's politics has been a great disturbance bringing with it an enormous load of negativity, the consequences of this is the resulting violence characterized with Nigeria's inter-party and intraparty politics.

High Rate of Illiteracy in Nigeria; This development results to a flock of electorates who are unaware of their rights and privileges and this make them easy target of politicians maneuvers (Chris, 2016). They can be easily cajoled, threatened, and bribed into the wrong exercise of their franchise, and some will aid the politicians in ballot stuffing, election thuggery, and general disruption of the electoral process.

High Poverty and Unemployment Rates in the Country; In all, the struggle to win and control state power and use same for personal economic advantage is the root of all electoral frauds and malpractices in Nigeria. Okafor (2003) in Orban (2008:10), and Akuul (2013) collaborates the foregoing thesis when they asserted that Nigeria's political instability can be traced to socio-economic factors particularly poverty. Poverty as it is threatens life and the anxiety to go on living pushes the people to options detrimental to stable governance. The rich few in the society also exploit the situation of the majority to influence and determine their actions (Akuul, 2013; Orban, 2008). Unemployment is still very high giving rise to all forms of ethno/religious conflicts, armed robbery, cultism, and assassination galore. Political violence receives a boost because of the large army of unemployed youths who are ready to be cured for a fee. Because of the patronage by the politicians, these youths have organized themselves into cult groups and thugs (Akuul, 2013).

The Effect of Flawed Elections on Political Stability in Nigerian in the Fourth Republic

Elections especially its freeness and fairness constitute the central factor in ensuring democratic survival. The conduct of free, fair and credible periodic elections by unbiased electoral body including its umpire as well as other electoral officials and the adherence to democratic principles of governance remain major factors responsible for the avoidance of violence in any democratic society. According to Omodia (2009) in Alfa and Otaida (2012:47), the lack of

free and fair elections threatens the democratic process as a result of legitimacy. It also generates into unprecedented violence (Abimbola and Adesote, 2014:13). More importantly, high degrees of conflict or continuous electoral violence are capable of creating political unrest and as result instability; and slow the sustenance and consolidation of democracy as well as development (Abimbola and Adesote 2014:13).

In Nigeria, a common feature of elections and electoral process is that it has been by irregularities, fraud and lack of credibility (Nachana'a et al, 2014:15). Election rigging or irregularities have failed to produce a government that will be popularly acceptable. This is because some of the leaders that emerged victorious in her elections have found themselves in the corridors of power using all forms of manipulations and this restricted the chances of true candidates from winning the election even though they are people's choice. When this unpopular candidate is elected, the people will be reluctant to support his administration as they feel that the government is a stolen mandate.

To Oddih (2007), when an election is rigged the choices of the citizens are invariably annulled and the government that emerges cannot represent, protect, and affect the interest and aspirations of the people. This, invariably, has led to virtually, all the social, political, economic, and cultural problems Nigerians are still battling with today. Economically, production of goods and services is still very low, the naira currency has never appreciated against major foreign currencies like the US dollar or British pound sterling. Unemployment is still very high giving rise to all forms of ethno/religious conflicts. Armed robbery, cultism, and assassination galore, strike actions by labour unions and pressure groups; are features of contemporary democracy (Oddih, 2007 in Jega and Ibeanu, 2007:180). Nearly all the states of the federation have experienced one form of mass violence or the other, ranging from the Bakassi/MASSOB, Afenifere, OPC, Ijaw/Isekeri, Odi, Umuleri/Aguleri, to Benue/Taraba, Kaduna, Kano, and Plateau crises (Oddih 2007 in Jega and Ibeanu, 2007:180). According to Lopez Pinter (2010:9), electoral fraud has more serious political implications, in that it allows a party or candidates to take over public positions contrary to the popular will. This undermines the democratic process and usually leads to electoral violence, insecurity and political instability. It is important to emphasize here that though violence has been a long-standing feature of the democratization process in the post-colonial Nigeria, its recent manifestations especially since the birth of the Fourth Republic has assumed an unprecedented magnitude thus constituting a major threat to political stability.

Reports indicate that, more than 11,000 people were killed in hundreds of separate outbreaks of politically motivated communal violence in Nigeria between 1999 and 2007 (Aniekwe and Kushie, 2011:8). During the same period, the country recorded several high cases of politically motivated assassinations. According to Ijere (2015:32), the events have shown that the hope and expectation of Nigerians of the suppose gains of democratization has been

threatened by incessant violence that have consumed thousands of lives, rendered thousand more internally displaced and properties worth millions dollars destroyed. For instance, the political unrest and spate of insecurity which have invaded parts of the northern geo-political zone have their links to the disputed presidential elections in 2011. For the umpteenth time, it has shown that politics of tolerance and accommodation, bargaining and compromise are yet to be enthroned in the Fourth Republic politics. The aftermath of the general elections of 2011 continue to pose major threat to the socio-economic and political development of the country.

Conclusion

The persistent and endemic nature of election fraud in Nigeria overtime has remained a clog in the wheels of democratic progress and invariably portends danger for democratic consolation. Thus, election rigging is without doubt a manifestation of the failure of democratic consolidation, and a threat to democracy in the country. Therefore, for the democratic politics to enjoy both domestic and international acceptability and legitimacy, the value orientations of the political elites must be transformed so that elections are not regarded as a game to be perverted at will to achieve an end.

Recommendations

Based on the above scenario, the following recommendations to improve the electoral process and to enhance free and fair elections in Nigeria:

1. Introduction new technology into our electoral process. There is every need by INEC to further deploy technology in other areas of the electoral process, especially in results tabulation and transmission, in online voters' registration and even in piloting electronic voting..
2. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and relevant agencies such as the National Orientation Agency (NOA) should embark on vigorous education and value-orientation and re-orientation aimed at repositioning democratic institutions and the citizenry.
3. Pragmatic and proactive effort must be made by those in position of authority to create employment opportunities and reduce poverty.
4. Godfatherism should be discourages if the nation must live up to its national development. This will help to develop self-confidence in voters and citizens and they will be able to successfully cope with and fight associated with election fraud.
5. Security agents must be professional and properly trained in the roles they are expected to perform both during and after election. The current tendency to over protect the ruling party is unacceptable. Security agents must be seen to be impartial and must resist being used for election malpractice.
6. Party politics should be made less rewarding, especially in the aspect of

salaries and other remunerations attach to public office.

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