

The 2015 General Elections In Nigeria: Emerging Issues

Edited **by**
John Tor Tsuwa, PhD
Elijah Terdoo Ikpanor

CONTENTS

<i>Dedication</i>	<i>v</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>vi</i>
<i>Notes on Editors</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>Foreword</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Contents</i>	<i>xi</i>
1. The Historicity of Electoral Violence in Nigeria Kenneth T. Azaigba	1
2. Electoral Violence and 2015 General Elections in Nigeria Desmond Okechukwu Nnamani and Judithmary Ogochukwu Iloh	14
3. The Foreign Media and Nigeria's 2015 General Elections Bem Japhet Audu	43
4. Countering Operational Challenges Recorded in the 2015 General Elections for Efficient Administration of Future Elections in Nigeria James Okolie-Osemene	59
5. Making the Votes Count: <i>Interrogating the Role of Collation Officers in Benue North-East Senatorial Election in Benue State in the 2015 General Elections</i> John Tor Tsuwa	69
6. Female Candidates and the 2015 General Election in Nigeria Samuel Enyi Otsapa	95

Making the Votes Count: Interrogating the Role of Collation Officers in Benue North-East Senatorial Election in Benue State in the 2015 General Elections

John Tor Tsuwa

Introduction

Critical to every liberal democratic formation is the idea of periodic free, fair and credible elections that are conducted by a neutral umpire. According to Collier (2010), elections are the institutional technology of any democracy. They have the potential to make government both more accountable and more legitimate. According to Ibrahim and Ibeanu (2009), elections are the bedrock of any democratic process. They argued that;

Freedom of the people to exercise their franchise is fundamental to liberal democracy. Thus, elections have meaning for most people only in a democratic context because they lead to the choice of decision makers by the majority of citizens.

The above suits into the explanation of Dunmoye (2010) who points out that, election is a government administered process by which people whether opposed or unopposed, seek a political party's nomination for, or election to public office.

Today's international community has moved towards democracy as against all other forms of governance. In contemporary world, elections are the only legitimate means by which governments can claim the right to power and exercise political authority. As the world is democratizing, so the need for the state to develop institutional frameworks to conduct free, fair and credible elections. There is therefore a great link between democracy and free, fair and credible elections in a context of civil liberties, competitive party politics, selection of alternative

candidates for offices and on the presence of political institutions that regulate and guarantee the roles of government and opposition. Dunmoye (2010).

From the above, we can deduce that, elections must be conducted by a neutral body that is well trained, equipped and unbiased. The professionalism of this body is to create confidence in all the parties and their candidates so as to make them support the electoral process. It is therefore clear that the role of this electoral body is crucial to the democratic process. In Nigeria, section S.153 of the 1999 constitution gives the powers of conducting elections to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and this powers and functions are further strengthened in the Electoral Act 2010 (as Amended). The functions of INEC according to the Electoral Act as amended include:

- i. Organize, undertake and supervise all elections to the offices of the President and Vice President, the Governor and Deputy Governor of a state, and to the membership of the Senate, the House of Representatives, and the House of Assembly of each state of the Federation.
- ii. Register political parties in accordance with the provisions of this constitution and an Act of the National Assembly.
- iii. Monitor the organization and operation of the political parties, including their finances.
- iv. Arrange for the annual examination and auditing of the funds and accounts of political parties, and publish a report of such examination and audit for information.
- v. Arrange and conduct registration of persons qualified to vote, and prepare, maintain, revise the register of voters for the purpose of any election under this constitution.
- vi. Monitor political campaigns and provide rules and regulations which govern the political parties.
- vii. Ensure that all Electoral Commissioners, Electoral and Returning Officers take and subscribes to the oath of office prescribed by law.
- viii. Delegate any of its powers to any Resident Electoral commissioner.

- ix. Carryout such other functions as may be conferred upon an Act of the National Assembly (Justice Uwais Electoral Reform committee, 2008:157.

With this legal backing to register political parties, register voters, screen candidates, conduct elections and announce results amongst others, INEC has gained legitimacy as only the political parties and candidates presented by INEC, elections conducted, collated and the results announced by INEC are considered legitimate and legal. To achieve this, INEC is to use all necessary materials and strategies that will enable it deliver on its mandate. It is wont to argue at this point that, due to the low level of technological and infrastructural development of Nigeria, INEC has not been able to digitalize its activities especially the voting, counting and result announcing process.

Consequently, instead of developing to a modern method of elections such as electronic voting system, it still depends on manual election process. Although the 2015 general elections in Nigeria witnessed an improvement in the area of accreditation which was carried out using the card reader, INEC still depended largely on manual score sheets, and other materials including the ballot papers and boxes. Again, instead of the results been displayed and announced automatically, INEC depended largely on ad-hoc staff to perform various functions in the electoral process ranging from vote counting, result collation and announcement.

It is wont to state here that INEC had engaged many ad-hoc staff to help the body achieve its purpose. This paper focuses only on the collation officers. The function and powers of the officers are stated on page 52 of the manual for election officials 2015. The procedure stated *inter alia* that;

1.) **Over Voting:** Where, the total number of votes cast at a polling unit exceeds the number of registered voters in the polling units, the result of the election for that polling unit shall be declared null and void. Similarly, where the total number of votes cast at a polling unit exceeds the total number of accredited voters, the outcome of the election shall be declared null and void.

2.) The RA/Ward Collation Officer shall examine the report and reconcile the figures. Where the figures cannot be reconciled and the RA/Ward collation officer is satisfied that it as a result of malpractice, he/she shall declare such result null and void and make a report to the LGA collation officer.

INEC guidelines in the 2015 general elections also insisted that the card reader is an integral part of collation at the registration area and where the total number of voters accredited by the card reader defers from the figures presented especially in excess, the collation officer can also declare the results null and void except if the incidence forms were appropriately filled and signed by the presiding officials. Armed with the above powers, the collation officers assigned to Benue North-East Senatorial District popularly known as Zone A of Benue State during the 2015 general elections cancelled many results that were falsified, manipulated or that were mutilated. This paper therefore analyses the role of the collation officers at the various local government collation centres in Zone A with emphasis on the senatorial election which made it possible for only the guinea votes of the people to be counted.

Theorizing the Problematic

As stated earlier, democracy ensures an individual's liberty to make choices of who governs him/her and the manner in which he/she is governed to enhance the good of all. To analyze the role of the collation officers in making the votes of the people count so as to ensure a vibrant and collective democracy, this paper adopts the democratic socialist arguments of Thomas Hill Green (1836-1883). In his opening argument, he insists that, freedom, rightly understood, is the greatest of all blessings; that attainment of freedom is the true end of our efforts as citizens. According to Green, freedom is the liberation of the powers of all men equally for contributions to a common good. To Green, individual freedom comes not from people being able to contribute to their own welfare but from people being able to contribute to the society as a whole. To him, government has a special duty to take steps that will increase the freedom of the

people so that they can contribute to societal development. Deducing from his argument, we can argue that for instance industrialization gave room for individual property ownership which privatized resources, this made it possible for the wealthy and owners of property to treat those who do not have as ordinary people who are, according to Baradat (2012), driven from their land to the factories and remain dependent on production and distribution system which they do not have control. The people are therefore subjects in the hands of the ownership class. Within this background, Green as cited by Baradat (2012), calls for the people to use the state and its institutions to create a state that will be for all instead of the one controlled by the ownership/ruling class. He therefore advocated for a welfare state that will improve the lives of the people through policies such as promoting free education, labour laws, protecting women and children among others. It is therefore clear that the ideal government is that which is responsible for liberating citizens economically, socially, as well as politically and legally.

We can deduce from here that, the centrality of a democratic government duly elected by the people and exercising the authority of the people is to liberate and protect its citizenry against the negative powers of an autocratic or dictatorial ruling class which they were under. This desire for liberation can only be achieved through collective actions of both the individual and governmental institutions. Greens' theory is applicable here because, the Nigerian citizenry had in the past 16 years of return to civil rule suffered from the poor performance of a government that Tsuwa (2010) had described as a government of personal clientalism. In this kind of government, Tsuwa argues, order is a situation where corruption is used to emasculate the greater majority in order to impoverish them mentally, economically, politically. This condition subjugate the masses to the condition of docility where their power to make choices on who governs them and how they are governed is eroded. Operating within this nature of society with a sharp absence of the core tenets of democracy, INEC, a governmental institution and its ad-hoc staff

particularly the collation officers had corroborated to use their constitutional privilege to liberate the people from a "cabal" that perpetuate themselves in power not through good performance and legitimacy acquired through the conduct of free, fair and credible periodic elections but through manipulation of the electoral process.

We can argue that, what the collation officers did through the instrumentality of INEC with the aim of ensuring a free, fair and credible election that will be acceptable to all the stakeholders including election monitors and observers can best suit into Qathafi (1975) arguments that, with the usurpation of the power of the people by a ruling political class, the people have the right to struggle through a popular revolution aided by and supported by governmental institutions to destroy the instruments which usurp democracy and sovereignty and took them away from the masses. The actions of the collation officers were therefore within their legitimate powers and can be seen as a democratic revolution where the people (collation officers) rejected financial inducement and intimidation that would have empowered them individually but deprived the generality of the Zone A people to ensure free, fair and credible elections.

Conceptualizing Elections

Fundamental to the process of representation especially in open societies that cherish the freedom and right of those whom the actor is representing is the ideal of election. Within the ideal of election, the idea of voting is inbuilt as the act of voting leads to election. The vote elects the representatives who are to act on behalf of the electorates. Election can therefore be seen as a systematic strategy in selecting among choices a preferred actor to lead on behalf of a group of people. According to Ejumudo (2010) elections are the technical means or instruments of ensuring popular participation in governance with the dictates of modern democracies and hallmark of legitimacy.

Herden (2006) conceptualized elections as the competition for votes among contending political parties in democratic societies. From this definition, we can deduce that election occur when

there is a need to select among competing choices the most competent by a person or a group of persons, a particular choice to perform particular functions for the people. This is why Adejumbi (1998) situates the symbolism of elections within the context of popular sovereignty and the expression of the social pact between the states and the people when he asserts that they are the kernel of political accountability and a means of ensuring reciprocity and exchange between the governors and the governed.

Elections therefore entails the ability and freedom of members of a particular organization, association or society within the guidelines provided in their constitution to express their choice by selecting among their members especially those who indicate interest who to govern them. The idea of elections has many issues built within. One, it means that there is a need for leadership or representation of the group. Two, there are laid down conditionalities and structures to select the representative. Three, that election confers legitimacy on the representative. Four, election gives the voter the liberty to make a choice out of the competing choices. Five, elections present an opportunity for signing a social contract between the people and their leaders. Six, election gives the voter the right to recall the representative in situation where the representative fails to meet his/her own side of the contract entered into during the period of elections. Seven, elections are a viable tool for social mobilization as it helps in organizing and mobilizing supporters. It also serves as a means of educating the electorates of the functions, goals and policies of the government.

Elections are therefore the core of liberal democracy. The level of importance of election is succinctly, captured by Diamond and Lipset as cited by Egwemi (2013) as;

...meaningful and extensive competing for positions of government power through regular, free and fair elections... inclusive political participation in election of leaders and policies, such that no major social group is prevented from exercising the right of citizenship... civil and

political...secured through political equality under a rule of law, sufficient to ensure that citizens can contest policies and advocate.

What we can glean from the above is that, elections provide the opportunity for competing interest to be aggregated and articulated. Those found favorable are endorsed and recommended for action while those that are seen as not favorable are discarded. It also reveals that this action must take place under a secured environment that will guarantee the freedom of the voter and his ability to make a choice and that choice be treated fairly is a free and credible process. Within the powers of election, the individual enjoys his right to have the policies he selects to be implemented as he has equal rights to the resumes of his society. The individual also enjoys the right to enjoy freedom, justice, equality; rule of law and basic social amenities. We can therefore conclude that, without elections, there will be no voters and without the voters, there will be no votes to be counted, and without votes counting, the individual's privilege to make choice in a liberal democracy is eroded.

The Struggle for Democracy in Africa: A Brief Discourse.

Analyzing political events in Africa and particularly the power of an African voter cannot be done without a historical import of African political and economic system. Outwardly, it is argued that African societies were conquered in the name of Christianizing and civilizing the people, however, in reality, it was exploitatively motivated. This exploitation became brutal in many African societies as Africa was ethnicized and enemy images created to divide Africans for easy exploitation. With this capture of the "Native", the people did not only lose their land resource and all that came with it to the conquerors, but they also lost their power to make choices in who leads them and how they are led. According to Dowden (2009) the conquest of Africa by the Europeans resulted to two dangerous events. The land was seized and the indigenous population driven to the margins and reduced to servility. In this case, all non-white

people lost their land tenure and voting right. We can argue from Dowden's observation that, in this kind of situation, Africans did not have the privilege to organize and develop their hitherto existing political system which in most cases was consensual in nature. They were subjected to new democratic practices that were alien to their custom and culture with varying implication on their self rule.

Within this dynamics came the struggle for self rule. The trauma from the massive economic, political, cultural and psychological exploitation of African's and the new currents of democratization in the world made the struggle for independence to become heightened. As Dowden (2009) argued, the struggle for self-rule in Africa was mixed in two swirling currents: one, the Marxist, based on the belief that imperialism is about economic exploitation and the sole desire was to change the structures and seize political power so that the economy could be run in the interest of the masses. Two, the *Africanist* perspective which was a reaction to racial oppression and was less aimed at seizing power in order to change economic structures, but was more about freeing Africans from Alien rule and restoring the pride of the African race.

From the above, it is wont to argue that, the central idea towards the struggle for independence was that of self rule which will afford the Africans the opportunity to own, determine and control the events that shape their life in their societies. It was to re-establish African political authority which was eroded by the European conquerors. The central issue here is that, whether African states were states or stateless societies, issues of representation, justice and accountability were central to their operation and a communitarian approach to life was paramount. From the struggle came independence with the expectations that Africa will change and improve especially in the area of the ability of the people to makes a choice of who rule and how the person rules. Consequently, African's took over governance and the authority to mobilize and allocate resources. The wishes and desire of the masses was therefore to enjoy from the largess their resources afforded them. They also anticipated an end to injustice,

inequality and oppression just as they hoped for the eradication of segregation and equal access to economic and political power anchored on the liberty of the people to collectively preside over their affairs.

Paradoxically, independence was not yet *uhuru* as the indigenous elite that took over political power from the colonial imperialist not only worked to perpetuate colonial policies which they benefited from but also developed their own imperialistic ego that ostracized the masses from the governance process. Achebe (1966) captures this succinctly when he argued that;

The trouble with our new nation was that none of us had been indoors long enough to be able to say 'to hell with it' we had all been in the rain together until yesterday. Then a handful of us... the smart, and the lucky and hardly ever the best... had scrambled for the one shelter our former rulers left, and had taken it over and barricade themselves in... and from within they sought to persuade the rest through numerous loudspeakers, that the first phase of the struggle had been won... (Achebe 1966)

It is pertinent to argue from the above that, the new elites in Africa especially the political elite had grabbed the post colonial African societies and fenced the ruling boards showing clearly the outside position of the masses and the inside position of the ruling elites. African leaders at independence and in some cases till date embraced a cut ideology which is frequently massaged by a litany of sycophantic bigots who press sing and glorify the image of the leaders. African leaders such as Idi Amin, Mobutu to Sese Seko, Sani Abacha, Paul Biya, Al Bashir, Mubarrak, Rupiah Banda, Teodoro Obiang, Albert Benard Omar, Festus Mogae, Yahya Jammeh amongst others developed repressive status and insatiable appetite for primitive accumulation to the level that the people and their votes did not count. The political elite became so gargantuan in capturing and using power in such a way that the image of the political leader signifies power and authority which demands reverence and obedience. Dowden (2009) argues that,

...with all the powers of statehood at their disposal, doling out jobs, declaring states of emergency, deploying the police, the Big men (presidents) demanded and often got blind obedience. They identify personally and totally with the power of office. The president becomes the presidency with no distinction between the self and the office.

It is wont to argue from the above that at independence, African leaders detested opposition both in ideology and in governance. The African masses who clamoured for independence became detested and persecuted when they failed to accept the autocratic deposition of the political elite. According to Harden (1990) all tyrants suffer from same apocalyptic monomania. In Africa, the political elite particularly the president posture suffers from same. He captured the posture of African president when he described him (president) in the following words;

His face is on the money. His photograph hangs in every office in the realm. His ministers wear gold pins with his photographs of him on the lapels of their tailored pins tripped suits. He names streets, football stadiums, hospitals and universities after himself... He insists on been called "Doctor", "conqueror"... "the number one peasant"... "the national miracle" or the most popular leader in the world. He sleeps with the wives and daughters of powerful men in his government... He bans all political parties except the one he controls. He rigs elections. He emasculates the courts. He cows the press: He stifles the academia. He goes to church. Harden (1990)

With the above character of the African leader, the struggle by Africans for liberal democracy at independence became a mirage. Consequently, the desire for freedom and socio-political and economic liberation of Africans also became a mirage. The one party state attitude developed by post independence African political elites not only disempowered the people politically, but it also encroached on their rights to vote and be voted for as the political elites does nothing less than to perpetuate themselves in power without recourse to any democratic process. The ideal

of liberal democracy which ensures that credible elections take place is pulled out of the political lexicon of the African political leaders. The struggle by Africans to institute a viable democracy where the tenets of liberal democracy particularly that of periodic conduct of free, fair and credible elections by an umpire that will not be manipulated has remained a fight to be won.

The Dilemma of the Voter in Africa's Electoral System

The problem of credible elections in Africa has become the bane of the democratic experience of African states. Despite the acceptance to practice democracy by majority of African states, the quest to get hold and utilize power through the democratic process of elections has remained their pain and dislike. Since most Africans do not perform to liberate the voter, they fear the voter and his/her vote. Consequently they have developed new strategies of electoral competition which is either rooted in ethnicity or *godfatherism*. In heterogeneous societies or countries that are just emerging from civil wars, the politicians manipulate these sentiments to swap vote to their camp or to destroy and make invalid votes outside their camp.

For the incumbents, they both use these ingredients and also manipulate all governmental institutions to acquire power. For instance, commenting on the Kenyan presidential elections that re-elected President Kibaki in December 2007, Muli (2007) said that, the election was a coup d'état that erodes the votes that Kenyan's casted as the president announced his re-election while counting was still ongoing. As earlier mentioned, African incumbents hardly loose elections except where they are tele guided by prominent observers as happened in Zambia when Jimmy Carter sat in the presidential palace with president Kenneth Kaundu until he accepted defeat. The same happened in Nigeria when the peace committee led by Gen. A. Abubakar and other African statesmen played a vital role in making president Goodluck Jonathan to accept defeat.

It is worthy to note that, outside these arrangements, election results in Africa usually go the way of incumbent leaders. Leaders such as Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, Paul Biya of Cameroon,

Idriss Deby of Chad, Yahya Jammeh of Gambia, Lansana Conte of Guinea, Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, Jose Eduardo Santos of Angola, Umar Al-Bashir of Sudan among others have continued to manipulate the electoral process including adjusting the constitution to perpetuate their stay in office.

The consequence of this "perpetuative" behaviour on election and particularly on democracy is that, election becomes a mere ritual and a period of practicing "deity politics" which is aimed not on providing the dividends of democracy such as good roads, basic infrastructures and strengthening democratic institutions that will ensure good life for the people but instead, it is a period when money is looted by those in power and poorly packaged food stuffs such as rice, salt, spices, oil and low quality wrappers amongst others are distributed to the exploited masses. The task of democracy which is delivering on the mandate of the people is therefore changed as the mandate does not count. Mesquita (2007) had argued that autocrats who bring out bad policies as part of their political tactics often enjoy stable and durable leadership because they sacrisfy the growth and development of the state on the altar of protecting themselves to retain power.

Deducing from his argument, we can argue that, autocrats focus more on creating conditions that will cause more harm, pain and frustration to the voter to the degree that the voter will not be interested in casting his vote or protecting his casted vote. When this is achieved, the vote becomes valueless and he therefore retains his office and power. Sani (2009) painted a clear feature of the anti-credible election stand of African leaders when he argued that 75% of African leaders have never left power without force and compulsion. He argued that between 1960-1969, 28 of the 37 African leaders left office forcefully and between 2000-2004, 4 of them were forced out through coup.

Sani summarizes the behaviour of African leaders to election and calls it the third wave of democracy in the world. He insists that the resistance to credible election by African leaders has shown that, between 1970 to 2007, there were only two transfers of power through multi-party elections in only five African nations of Benin, Liberia, Madagascar, Mali and Nigeria; one

transfer of power via elections in fourteen African nations; no transfer of power through elections were held in twenty one African countries; and no elections at all in the remaining thirteen African nations.

Agreeing with Sani, Kinafa (2007) argues that, the detest for the democratic practice of credible elections has remained one of the major causes of protracted civil and ethnic wars, military rule and other trauma inducing features of Africa's political economy, a condition that has made the development potentials of the African continent weak.

It is pertinent to argue here that, elections in Africa move side by side with violence. These violence occur in many and different ways. One, intra-party violence which may occur during the process of individual parties nominating candidate for the general elections. In most cases, internal democracy is not observed and the delegates or the process of electing party flag bearers is not credibly carried out hence violence as those to vote in the party's primaries are deprived of having their votes counted. Two, the violence that characterized the campaign process. Here, armed gangs of the various political parties usually clash during the campaign process as many wish to exclude others from seeking support from other groups especially where they have strong hold. Thirdly, campaign speeches and songs also create violence between politicians and their supporters. It is worthy to note that this pre-general election violence also has a role in reducing the power of the votes. Firstly, the fear of violence creates apathy thereby keeping the voter away from voting thereby making his/her vote not to count. Secondly, it makes each political camp's to fortify their thuggery arsenal to rig the election through stuffing of ballot boxes or snatching and destroying them.

During the election proper, intimidation and outright violence is utilized in preventing the votes from being counted. Usually the government in power creates an identity politics of its people and the opposition are usually threatened to vote or be punished or forced out of their country. A clear example of this was witnessed in Kenya when president Arab Moi forced the mass

of Kikwuyu living in the Rift Valley who were likely to vote against him to move away from the region just few months to the elections. Analyzing the event in the pre-election period in Kenya in 2007, Kineyi and Njunguna (2005) observes that, "the central rationale of the violence appears to have been to maintain the political and economic status quo in the region during the run-up to the general election". This is why all the arms used in the crisis were manufactured in East Asia and Planted in the region by the government in which Moi was the head.

In Nigeria the techniques used in the Western Region election of 1965 were more brazen than those of 1964. The returning officers provided the main tool. Many deserted their posts after accepting nomination papers from government party candidates, thereby making it impossible for opposition candidates to file their won. Alternatively, when returning officers remained at their posts, they refused to accept an opposition candidate's nomination paper on some alleged technical fault. There were also cases where returning officers who refused to desert their duty posts were abducted in a pre-arranged manner after receiving the government candidates' nominations. Also, returning officers who had accepted nomination papers from opposition candidates and even issued certificates of validity had their appointments revoked, and their successors refused to recognize the validity of such certificates or to accept new nomination papers. By these means, the ruling party, the NNDP, was able at the close of the nomination to get as many as sixteen candidates declared unopposed. When all these failed and an opposition candidate was elected, the results were in most cases reversed in favour of the defeated government candidate who would then be promptly announced on the government radio as the winner (Ejumudo, 2010).

Before the election, the regional premier, Chief Akintola, had boasted that whether the people voted for them or not, the NNDP would be returned to power. As a consequence, the people of Western Nigeria took the law into their own hands and launched a regime of violence and arson that held the region in its bloody grip until the military take-over of January 1966 flushed out the

politicians. At the close of the Nigeria's First Republic, the institution of free and credible elections that is the cornerstone of democracy had ceased to have any meaning in Nigeria. The 1965 elections were so controversial because they were largely characterized by electoral manipulations, irregularities and violence with the ignoble role of the electoral body evidently linked to it.

The 1979 elections although characterized by electoral fraud, were not largely faulted and discredited compared with the electoral manipulation and crisis that accompanied the 1983 elections where the defunct National Party of Nigeria perpetrated electoral injustice through the cavalier manner with which they captured, particularly governorship seats, in the country. During the 1983 federal and state elections, some employed. Dumping of ballot papers and falsification of results however provided the main methods used. In a few cases, the police actually caught some persons in illegal possession of ballot boxes and papers or in the act of thumb-marking ballot papers in private houses with a view to dumping them into ballot boxes later (Agbaje, 2005). The key agents in the dumping of ballot papers were the presiding officers and poll clerks at the polling stations. This and many other electoral malpractices connived to frustrate the Nigerian electoral process.

Democracy and Elections: The Debate on the value of the vote
As critical as elections are in the representation of the peoples choices there are arguments that liberal democracy, especially representative democracy, whose cardinal ingredient is periodic elections to select representative is an abnormally. Qathafi (1975) argued that, the masses are completely isolated from the representative process. He argued that, immediately after winning their votes, the representative usurps the sovereignty of the voters and act outside of them. He becomes endowed with the sacredness and immunity denied to other individual members of the society. Qathafi insists that, the parliament is a means of plundering and usurping the people's authority. The argument also states that, party politics also leads to a situation

where members elected represents their party instead of the people and in a situation where you have a coalition of parties, the elected persons represents the interest of the parties and not the people. He argues that, such a coalition is the power of the combined parties and not of the people, instead, under this circumstance, the people are victims, fooled and exploited by political bodies. He insisted that, in liberal democracy;

The people stand silently in long queues to cast their votes in the ballot boxes in the same way as they throw other papers into the dustbin...all these is based on propoganda to win votes, it is a demagogic system in the real world, and votes can be bought and falsified (Qathafi 1995:11).

From the above, we can deduce that, elections especially under representative arrangement in developing countries where liberal democracy has not taken deep roots does not in concrete terms give the individual voter the privilege of even voting. In situations where it confers them with that privilege, it fails to allow them access to decision making as he/she is represented by a person they might not share the same identity and needs. In most cases, the political godfathers who emasculate the electorates by buying their votes in poor economic circumstances or by falsifying the vote figures determine the actions and inactions of their stooges in power. It is therefore pertinent to argue here that, the Nigerian electorates over the years have experienced this dexeterition and have in turn, as suggested by Qathafi, hoped for when they will have opportunity to struggle for a process where their votes will count.

Closely related to the arguments of Qathafi on the undemocratic nature of representative democracy and how the vote of the voter is in most cases not appreciated, Baradat (2012) argues that, not everybody who voted in an election has his/her vote count or is represented in the governance process. To him, there are basically two kinds of electoral districts; the single - member district and the multimember district. In a single member district, irrespective of the number of candidates running, only one person is elected thereby manifesting in a

winner - takes - all situations. In this situation, the person that has the highest number of simple majority of votes becomes the winner. The argument here is that the votes of those who voted for the loser candidate are not valued and so do not amount to anything as the choice of the voter is not recorded and considered. This is why it is argued that electoral democracy is the tyranny of the majority as it deprives the minority the right to occupy office through their votes. In some cases, despite the fact that the winner won with the largest number of votes, a majority of voters may by 46% voted against the winner but since it is by simple majority, the one that scored 54% wins thereby in the words of Flathman (2005) making the votes of the group with 46% not to count towards electing their representative. He argues further that in this situation, it is often difficult for smaller parties to rise to power except where they are able to attract cross carpenter from the ruling party.

Aside the singled member electoral system is the multimember electoral system. This system provides for the election of several officials from a given district. Here, the seats are distributed on an equal basis between the constituencies. In this circumstance, each party is expected to win a seat and its votes count in at least one area. Despite the many arguments concerning making the votes count in a liberal democracy the arguments of this paper on the value of the voter and his/her vote and on the vote count is different. While the others focus on the percentages and proportion of the votes and their impact on the representation, this paper focuses on the degree to which all the votes counted irrespective of who wins and in what percentage. The emphasis here is on not falsifying the votes, not mutilating the votes, not buying the votes and not manipulating the votes. The emphasis is on the actual and realistic votes casted by the people which are to count genuinely on the side of both the winner and the loser if liberal democracy is to be consolidated in Nigeria.

Making the Votes Count: Collation Officer's and the 2015 Elections in Benue North-East Senatorial District.

The power of the vote in bringing those in power to power shows clearly, that the votes of the citizens need to count. This is why Collier (2010) had argued that, Ballots, not bullets, should pave the route to power. As a result of this most democracies including those of the third world nations who are at the fringes of core tenets of liberal democracies have embraced the idea of periodic elections. It is clear from our analysis that elections do not count as a result of many factors ranging from falsification of results, buying of votes, stiffing of ballots, manipulating the electoral process and its agents as well as depriving the people from voting the candidates of their choice. In this case, when the desire of politicians to ingratiate themselves with the voters fails, they result to intimidation of the voters. Thuggery therefore become a major way of preventing the people from voting and letting their votes count. For us to ascertain if voters' vote counts or not, we first need to know the total number of eligible voters based on registration by the electoral body.

Table 1: Total number of PVC distributed in Benue State as at 05/3/2015

LGA	CODE	TOTAL PVC RECEIVED	TOTAL B/F	MALE	FEMALE	MONTHLY DISTRIBUTION	TOTAL PVC DISTRIBUTION	BALANCE	% DISTR
Ado	01	60,959	47,491	99	79	178	47669	13,290	78%
Agatu	02	47,363	43,827	29	23	52	43879	3,484	93%
Apa	03	46,676	39,171	42	42	39213	7,463		84%
Buruku	04	94,859	80,202	6	7	13	80215	14,644	85%
Ghoko	05	195,353	145,533	554	503	1057	146590	48,763	75%
Guma	06	59,548	51,294	0	0	0	51294	8,254	86%
Gwer East	07	80,861	64,449	117	72	189	64638	16,223	80%
Gwer West	08	51,826	40,273	3251	3251	43524	8,302		84%
Katsina-Ala	09	105,295	90,904	0	0	0	90904	14,391	86%
Komshisha	10	102,311	95,974	99	99	96073	6,238		94%
Kwande	11	136,596	110,870	77	46	123	110993	25,603	81%
Logo	12	78,366	68,034	39	16	55	68089	10,277	87%
Makurdi	13	192,129	102,279	876	711	1587	103866	88,263	54%
Oju	14	51,193	45,077	3568	3568	48645	2,548		95%
Ogbadibo	15	51,781	32,801	2205	2106	4311	37112	14,669	72%
Oju	16	84,361	76,912	100	99	199	77111	7,250	91%
Oramiri	17	33,323	26,487	55	16	71	26558	6,765	80%
Orkpa	18		56,771	51,271	0		51271	5,500	90%
Orkpa	19	106,451	87,506	2435	2435	89941	16,510		84%
Tarka	20	39,561	29,810	44	34	78	29888	9,673	76%
Ukum	21	104,877	89,289	1353	756	2109	91398	13,479	87%
Ushongo	22	92,836	72,456	304	204	508	72964	19,872	79%
Vandikya	23	116,474	95,817	90	58	148	95965	20,509	82%
TOTAL	1,989,770	1,587,727	15343	4730	20073	1607800	381,970		83%

Source: INEC office Makurdi 2015

The above table shows the total number of registered voters in Benue state and the ratio of distribution of PVC in all the local

governments in the state. It is pertinent to inform that, after the election was postponed, more PVC's were distributed in Benue State bringing the total number of PVCs distributed in Benue State to 1, 607,800 out of the 1, 989, 770 received. This shows clearly that INEC had achieved over 90% in its PVC distribution efforts and was therefore set to deliver free, fair and credible elections in the state with the support of the ad hoc staff and other stakeholders.

The first of the elections was the presidential and National Assembly elections. The high point of this election in Benue North East (Zone A) and that which this paper focuses on was the senatorial election. The contest of this election was between the incumbent governor Gabriel Torwua Suswam and incumbent senator representing the zone, Sen. B.A.I. Gemade. Sen. Gemade, a former national chairman of his party the PDP, was forced out of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) by the governor who became the sole candidate for the PDP in the election. Gemade ran to his inlaw, the former governor of the state, Sen. George Akume, the leader of the All Progressives Congress (APC) in the state and the Senate minority leader Sen. Akume's intervention gave Sen. Gemade the APC senatorial ticket to contest against Suswam in the general elections. The campaigns were hot with hate speeches from all camps and since incumbent's hardly loose elections in Nigeria, the governor and his team never thought otherwise as they had all apparatus of security and other resources at their disposal. Sen. Gemade on the other hand depended on the people who were frustrated by the governor as salaries were not paid for mouths and there was a total breakdown in the provision of basic services and INEC card reader directive to defeat the powerful governor who had vowed to win the election through all means.

At the end of the elections, Sen. Gemade won with 140,715 against governor Suswam's 118,603. This was a hard fought battle for the two political big wigs. It is worthy to note that the collation officers were the ones that determined the outcome of the election. Oral narrations by most of the collation officers that participated in the election in zone A during the presentation of

the results at the INEC headquarters in Makurdi revealed that, the zone witnessed high level of electoral thuggery, harassment and all other kinds of electoral malpractices especially from the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP). They argued that, in most cases, the ruling party connived with security agencies to harass, intimidate and manipulate the results at the polling units before they arrived at the collation centre. In some cases, electoral materials were diverted to private houses and results returned to the collation centers' by security agents and party officials. All these was done without bearing in mind that the collation officers were to verify the number of accredited voters through the card reader and to dictate the polling units where the number of accredited voters was different from the actual votes presented to the collation officers as the final result.

It is worthy to note here that, the INEC resident electoral commissioner Prof. Istifanus Dafwang after accessing the high level of insecurity and harassment of electoral officers and the ad hoc staff in the Zone, recalled all the Local government electoral officers, the collation officers and the returning officers to INEC headquarters to Makurdi. Ordinarily and normally, the Zone A senatorial election results are announced in Katsina-Ala which is the headquarters of the zone, but as a result of the security breaches particularly the burning down of the INEC offices in Logo and Konshisha local governments and the capture of the returning officer for Ukum local government by PDP thugs supported by the security agencies, the REC had no option than to relocate the Zone A officers to Makurdi.

Before their recall to the headquarters in Makurdi, many of the collation officers had concluded the collation of the result and cancelled most of the results based on the record in the card reader. Narrations by the collation officers adduce to many reasons why such results were cancelled. One, in many areas electoral materials were not sent to the voting points as they were diverted to private houses or they arrived late and as such, election was not conducted but results brought. Two, results sheets did not accompany the other voting materials and as such, the votes cast at the polling units were not the once brought to

the collation centre's. Three, ballot boxes were snatched and stuffed with already thumb printed ballots. Four, results were announced in some areas while voting and counting was still in progress. Five, the number of accredited voters on the card reader did not tally with the results presented to the collation officer. Six, some polling units brought results that were more than the total number of registered voters in the area. Seven, there was harassment, intimidation and capture of electoral officials and confiscation of results.

Table II: Summary of total cancelled votes/results during the Zone A senatorial election

S/No	Name of LG	No. of PU	No. of Registered Voters	APC Votes scored	PDP Votes scored	Total cancelled Votes	Remarks
1	Katsina-Ala	185	99,939	13,152	30,124	12,231	Over voting, manual accreditation, coercion of ad hoc staff, hijacking of materials, snatching of materials, results returned by security agencies etc.
2	Konshisha	212	102,297	34,376	7,191	1,012	-Do-
3	Kwande	248	129,788	29,001	16,379	543	-do-
4	Logo	131	77,506	6,016	16,687	14,200	-do-
5	Ukum	233	95,309	13,425	19,315	28,682	-do-
6	Ushongo	158	91,671	18,956	13,314	3,124	-do-
7	Vandeikya	230	118,042	25,789	15,593	13,498	-do-

Source: INEC headquarters Makurdi and INEC local government offices 2015

The politics of what can be seen in the above table is that, the PDP had wished to utilize what Ibeanu (2007) refers to as machine politics to win. Machine politics to him is the highest stage of primitive accumulation of votes. In this situation whatever

strategy including elimination of political opponents, compromising electoral officers, falsification and manipulation of votes is acceptable provided results are announced in favor of the ruling party. The PDP with its hench men such as the incumbent governor Gabriel Suswam, the Zone A PDP chairman, Alh. Ibrahim Songo Anor, Mr. Solomon Wombo, the Governor's Special Adviser on local government and chieftaincy Affairs who was the PDP Chief rehing agent in the election, and other PDP big wings such as Chief Jack Tilley Gyado, Hon. Terfa Atii, Hon. Terfa Abur, Engr. Peter Torjum, Atsaga Anemba and Matthias Ibyuan amongst others were therefore determined to utilize the machine politics principles to achieve victory.

It is clear from the above table that in local governments such as Logo, Ukum and Katsina- Ala which are located in the governors inter-mediate community, the number of votes cancelled were more because his agents manipulated the system through the means shown in the remarks column of table II with the belief that the collation officers will not only jettison the card reader but also compromise the process and announce the result in favour of Governor Gabriel Suswam. In other areas particularly Vandeikya local government, the PDP Zone A Chairman Ibrahim Anor snatched the results of his Mbagbera council ward after the APC had won with 2,292 votes against PDP's 1,692 and the result declared at the ward level. The whole result for the council ward was therefore cancelled just as it happened in Mbadede council ward of same local government which has 12 polling units but instead of allowing the votes to be casted, chief. Jack Gyado and Hon. Cletus Akwaya supervised the diversion of materials to Gyado castle in Ihugh Town.

The table above also shows clearly that the collation officers who had the last say were equal to the task of ensuring that INEC's determination to deliver a free, fair and credible election was upheld. Been protected by the INEC guidelines and with the ideological stand to liberate the society from machine politics and ensure that the votes of the electorates counted, the collation officers performed their duties diligently and at the end, only the actual votes of the people counted to elect the senator representing zone A senatorial district of Benue state.

The assertion in the above paragraph is based on the fact that the Governor, Gabriel Suswam although at the initiate stage, rejected the results and instituted a court case against the winner, he later withdrew the case in a speech he captioned " My People betrayed me, so let the wishes of the people be respected". From his action and speech, it is the belief of this paper that truly the votes of the electorates counted in Zone A senatorial district of Benue state.

Concluding Remarks

It is a given that liberal democracy is the accepted form of governance in today's contemporary world. It is also a given that African incumbents hardly loose elections due to the amount of resources and other governmental apparatus at their disposal. From the above analysis, it is clear that the collective will of the people to liberate themselves from autocratic leadership is achievable when the people take out their personal benefits and consider the gains of the whole society. It also shows clearly that with more investment in technology, INEC will provide a more free, fair and credible election in Nigeria. This is why the incumbent governor of Benue state Gabriel Suswam lost the senatorial elections.

This paper therefore concludes that, it is possible for the incumbents to be defeated in elections in Nigeria and by extension Africa. The paper therefore recommends that to make Africans enjoy the benefits of their struggle for independence and to consolidate liberal democracy where their votes will count and they will enjoy the gains of democracy, INEC should introduce electronic voting system and there should be a change of orientation amongst Nigerians that democracy is not for primitive accumulation but it is for equality, freedom and the development of the society for the good of all the citizenry.

References

- Adejumobi S. (1998) "The Crisis of Election and Democracy, in Africa Quarterly. 38(2)
- Baradat L.P (2012) *Political Ideologies: Their Origins and Impact*. New Jerky. Pearson Education Ltd.
- Baradat L.P (2012) *Political Ideologies: Their Origins and Impact*. New Delhi. PHL Learning Private Ltd
- Collier, P (2010) *Wars, Guns, and Votes: Democracy in Dangerous Places*. London: Vintage
- Dunmoyé R.A (2010) "Nexus of Democratic Consolidation and Development Imperative in Africa" in Mato K (ed) *The Democratic Question and Elections Management in Africa* Ibadan Daily Graphic Ltd.
- Enojo, E.K (2013) Electoral Violence in Nigeria: Focus on the 2015 General Elections in Egweni, V (ed) *Issues in the 2011 General Elections in Nigeria*. Lagos Democracy Series 7
- Ejumudo K.O (2010) *A Review of Democratic Experience in Nigeria*. Journal of Social and Management Sciences, Delta State University
- Flathman, R. (2005) *Pluralism and liberal Democracy*. Baltimore, MD; Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Herden D.C (2006) *Democracy from City-states to Cosmopolitan Order*. Chicago; Free Press.
- Ibrahim J, & Ibeanu O (ed) (2009) *The 2007 Nigerian Election and the Subversion of Popular Sovereignty*. Lagos: Centre for Democracy
- INEC 2005 Election Guidelines
- Kimenyi M. & Ndungu N. (2005) "Sporadic Ethnic Violence: Why has Kenya not Experienced a Full Blown Civil War in Understanding Civil Vol 1 (ed) Collier P And Sambains Washington DC World Bank
- Kinafa, A.B (2005) "Pathways to Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria" Leadership News Paper, Vol. 2.
- Mesquith B.B (2007) *Political Instability as Source of Growth in Public Policy"*. Board of Trustee of Leland Standard University.
- Muli Koki (2007) "Kobaki win Spurs Kenya Turmoil" / Financial Times, December 31 Pg 6.

- Sani, S (2008) *Civilian Dictators of Africa*. Lagos: Prestige Books
- Shively, P (1999) *Power and Choice: An Introduction to Political Science*. USA McGraw Hill
- Tsuwa, J.T (2010) *Personal Rule; Sycophancy, and the Crisis of Democratic Governance in Nigeria* in Egodi et al (ed) *Perspectives on Leadership in Africa*. Nsukka, Afro-Organis Publication.
- Oral accounts by INEC adhoc staff (collation officers) during result presentation at INEC headquarters in Makurdi.