



The Challenges and Prospects of Election Management in Nigeria's Democracy.

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Abstract

Election serve as mechanisms for selection of leaders, change, transfer or retention of power by the government within the ambits of laid down rules and regulations. Election is a vital tool for survival of any democracy whether international, national or local, it must conform to the principle of free and fair election. However, most democracies across the world appear to give little or no attention to the cardinal principles of credible elections. Nigeria is no exception in this perceived fragrant disregard for credible elections. This paper adopted a qualitative methodology with reliance on secondary sources of data and examined essentially the role of electoral management bodies in managing elections in Nigeria and the challenges confronting them. It discovered that these electoral management institutions are confronted with several challenges which undermines the credibility of the elections that they superintend. The paper equally uncovered some of the challenges facing them as the problem of communication and logistics, insecurity, poverty and compromise among Ad-hoc Staff during elections. It recommends long term adequate preparation for elections, need for attitudinal change and behavior among all actors, financial autonomy and independence of the electoral bodies from executive and other external influences and concluded that a judicious implementation of these recommendations will assist the electoral umpires in the conduct of free, fair and credible elections in Nigeria.

Keywords: Democracy, Election, Election Management, Prospects.

Introduction

In Nigeria, general elections take place every four years since the return to civilian rule and presidential order in 1999 with the exception of some off-session elections orchestrated by either court judgments or death of the occupants of the affected positions. Democracy is an encompassing concept and practice that embodies free and fair elections and other features such as existence of independent electoral body, independent judiciary, and entrenchment of fundamental human rights amongst others.

However, managing election here in terms of free and fair election in democratic system is central to the concept of democracy especially the representative system in the sense that it could serve as a measuring rod through which the attributes of democracy could be measured.



Thus, it is a common conception among Political Scientists and Public Analyst that, lack of free and fair election in a state is a function of both the concept of institutional fragility and poor political culture on the part of the people that constitute the driving force of democratic governance (Abdullahi, 2007; Almond, et al 2000; Ibaba 2007). The implication is that in a state where political institutions are fragile and political culture of the people are poor, there is bound to be political instability and crisis of legitimacy.

The above point captured the true picture of election in the third world countries which Nigeria is inclusive. There are evidence features of crisis in some states especially before and after the election; this is because there is the possibility on the inability of electoral umpire to manage the election in a credible manner. Although the issues of incredible election have been on the ground since the first republic were more of ethnic, poor political culture of both electorates and political office seekers towards the party politics rocked the democratic journey in less than six years of attainment of political independence by the Nigerian State. It is imperative to add that what rocked the first republic has been attributed to Socio-economic and Political Factors (Ake, 2001; Omodia, 2007).

In the Second Republic, the situations seem worse-off. This is because of the twin factor of colonialism and military dictatorship which adversely affected the democratic perception of Nigeria vis-a-vis their political institutions. The situation could be buttressed when one understands the facts that while the First Republic lasted for five years and few months that of the Second Republic lasted for less than five years.

The incidence of Third Republic gave people the impression that the more we advance in democratic journey the worst the situation, for a country to have survived first and second journey in democratic setting and was later aborted by the military Juntas, this shows that democracy is on trial and is in need for proper re-orientation to the populace, perhaps, the outcome of the election is the malfunction of electoral umpire that manage the election. Although some scholars have argued that, the Third Republic election is being considered to be one of the most free and fair election even though aborted, to some extent it has been applauded by some international observers and academicians.

The Fourth Republic, election was held in 1999 that ushered in Chief Olusegun Obasanjo into Power, the election was not properly managed within the tenet of the rules of the game. (Emarema,1999). Despite the shortcoming of the election, some believed that the assumption of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo into office would have been a takeoff ground to improve on the subsequent elections. This gives hope to Nigerians that democratic has come to stabilized hence the Military handed over Power to democratic elected President. After the 8 years of the then President, what we expect to be progressive credible election turned to be regressive that was fraught with unprecedented irregularities.

The Institution saddled with the responsibility of managing election in the country, for example, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) became worse with the outcomes of subsequent elections conducted. In fact, Ademola(2007 and Idris 2008) analyzed that even the Late Umar Yar'dua that took over from Chief Olusegun Obasanjo admitted that the election that brought him to power was marred with irregularities and promised a fundamental reform of the electoral process with a strong institution that would conduct free and fair election, unfortunately President Yar'dua died before he could fulfill the promise.



Again, apart from the aborted Third Republic journey, managing election during former President, Dr Goodluck Jonathan era was considered to be one of the best era under Prof. Attahiru Jega who superintended over the elections relatively effectively as the era witnessed the introduction of electronic registration process and the use of card reader, first of its kind in the history of Nigerian electoral system. Although this period was adjudged to be credible electoral outing for Nigeria, there was no consensus on this because some citizens (electorate) still argue that the elections conducted was marred by violence, ballot box stuffing, harassment and intimidation in some part of far Northern Nigeria.

Aftermath of former President Dr Goodluck Jonathan's era, there was a paradigm shift in management of election in Nigeria. The country began to witness fresh slogan in management of election called "inconclusive election", some cliques of electoral experts and Public Analyst are not satisfied with this system, and to sum it all, the act prompted some people to question the integrity of President Mahamadu Buhari, and Prof. Mammoud Yakubu the head of the electoral management institution in Nigeria.

The above calls for questioning on the neutrality and independence of electoral management bodies in Nigeria. In fact, electoral contest has thrown up a new language in our political lexicon known as "inconclusive election" and leaves one to wonder why an election should be inconclusive despite the enormous resources expended to conduct the election, in addition to the provision of adequate security before any election. It is on the premise of the above, that this paper attempts an examination of the challenges and prospects of managing elections in the country's nascent democracy.

Conceptual Clarifications

It is imperative to attempt a clarification of the basic concepts that are germane to the understanding and explanation of this paper. These are the concepts of democracy, election and election management.

Democracy

Democracy has won for itself a household name across the globe. It has gained popularity because it is believed to be a sine-qua-non for growth and development as the best form of government across the globe. According to Erunke (2012), democracy is a fluid concept that has received many definitions by scholars either in the classical political studies or in the contemporary world of the scholarship. According to Powell, Strom and Dalton (2004), democracy is a political system in which citizens enjoy a number of basic civil and political rights and which most of their political leaders are elected in free and fair election and accountable under the rule of law.

For Lipset (cited in Dada, 2013) democracy is a political system that supplies regular constitutional opportunities for changing the governing officials and a social mechanism that permit a larger political part of the population to influence major decisions by choosing among the contenders for political office. In the same vein, Schumpeter sees democracy as political method or type of institutional arrangement for arriving at political, legislative, and administrative decisions. According to him it is a method by means of competitive struggle for the people's vote and this competition for votes is the distinguishing character of the democratic method. However, this paper adopts the definition by Dahl (1982:11), which sees democracy as a system of elected representative government operated under the rule of law, where the most



significant groups in the population participate in the political process and have access to effective representation in the practice of making government decision that is, allocation of scarce resources.

Election

In the discipline of Political Science, there is no single meaning attached to the definition of election, different scholars see it in different ways, although they all agree that it must be free and fair. According to Ujo (2000), “election is one procedure of aggregating preferences of a particular kind, process of choosing between alternatives”. Election can be done in practice only through some form of procedure accepted as binding within the political society. Election can also be, described as the act of electing the candidates to represent the people of a given country in the Parliament, the Executives’ and other areas of government as stipulated in the constitution of that particular country. For example, in USA, Judges of the lower Court are elected. During elections, the electorate is given opportunity to choose between alternative programmes of contestants. Elections further promote public accountability. “The threat of defeat at the polls exerts pressure on those in power to conduct themselves in a responsible manner and take account of the popular interest and wishes when they take their decision”(Ujo, 2000).

Elections play a vital role in any society. Through election, it is easier for the people to remove bad government from office, the electorate has the free choice of electing candidates of their choice into various political offices. Election provides the means of ensuring the control and accountability of those who have been elected by the electorate, it creates the necessary avenue for the people to actively participate in decision making of their country, as they receive citizenship education and are educated about their political rights. Election can be used to measure the opinions of the people on issues of national importance, election promotes competition among the political parties and even the candidates and enhance equality of votes of citizens. It is the case of one man, one vote, and election confers legitimacy on the elected government in power. In the context of this paper, election remains the process of voting candidates presented by political parties into various political offices in Nigeria.

Election Management

The concept of “election Management” refer to act of managing election by the electoral body or institution which has the principle purpose of being legally responsible for, managing all, or some of the core elements that are essential for conducting any elections or/and any direct democratic activities such as referendum, recall votes and citizens’ initiative (Ademola, 2018). In the management of election in the country, the electoral institution undertakes the following core functions: determine who has the right and is eligible to participate in voting, accepts and validates the nomination of candidates’ for elections from political parties, prepare and open the Polling Centers including all the procedural and logistical efforts and preparations for elections, dealing with electoral complaints and disputes, dealing with the results of elections or the voting process in general and also responsibility for electoral boundary delimitation.



Types of Election

Direct election: This is a process in which the electorates (voters) cast their votes in an election for candidates of their choice to make decisions for them either at the executive or the legislative at the both the Federal, State, and Local Council level without any interference. In this process, the right of the voters is restored in voting for the right candidates of their choice, it affords mass participation in political decision making of the country and the equality of votes that is ‘one man, one vote’. More so, direct elections reflect popular choice of the people and it is simple and can easily be adopted in many countries of the world.

Indirect election: This entails a system whereby a voter chooses someone to vote on his behalf. The legislature and local government unit, may form the body known as “electoral college” which will vote for the candidate of their choice (on behalf of the citizens), as a result of the failure of the general election to produce a candidate, However, the American people do elect their President through the electoral college.

The Process of indirect election has possible advantages in that members of the college who are better educated politically can be chosen to represent the less educated and less politically enlightened ones. There is less violence in indirect election, the opportunity of rigging is partially absent and it is simple and cost effective compared to the direct election because the people that will be involved in the final election would be very small.

Bye Election: An election that take place to fill a vacant elective post as a result of some issues ranging from disqualification of a candidate either by court or by election management body, resignation or death of an individual holding the office.

Run-off election: This is where a second ballot is conducted between two candidates that receives the highest number of votes in the first election that did not produce a clear winner.

Primary Election: This is a process whereby a political party selects candidate that can adequately represent the interest of the party in a general election.

Referendum: This is a ‘Yes or No’ vote of the people, it involves voting by all individuals concerned and an instrument of direct intervention by the government. Referendum may cover the entire country.

Plebiscite: This is a ‘Yes or No’ vote of the people, mainly on issues of the national importance referred to them. It can be on some relevant public or political question like the issues of minorities in a political set up. A plebiscite may not cover the entire country but may be due on a particular section of the country.

Overview of Electoral Management Bodies in Nigeria

The origin of electoral bodies in Nigeria can be traced to the period before independence when the electoral commission of Nigeria (ECN) was established to conduct 1959 elections. This was followed by the Federal Election Commission (FEC) established in 1960 that conducted the immediate post-independence federal and regional elections of 1964 and 1965 respectively. This electoral body was however, dissolved after the military coup of 1966. In 1978, a new Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) was constituted by the regime of General Olusegun Obasanjo, which organized the general elections of 1979 which ushered in the Second Republic under the leadership of Alhaji Shehu Shagari and also conducted the general elections of 1983.

FEDECO was abolished at the end of the year 1983 by the military administration of General Muhammadu Buhari, which seized power on 30th December 1983. In 1987, the military



government of General Ibrahim Badamasi Babagida established the National Electoral Commission (NEC) to execute the government's transition program designed to usher in the democratic rule in 1993. The NEC conducted all the elections which put in place all the democratic institution beginning from Local Government Councils up to the National Assembly. NEC also conducted the Presidential election on June 12th, 1993, which was annulled by the same Military Government. Towards the end of 1993, NEC was also reconstituted to conduct a fresh Presidential election but was dissolved in November, 1993.

In December 1995, the military government of General Sani Abacha which earlier dissolved NEC established the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON) which also conducted another set of election, local government councils to National Assembly. NECON was however dissolved with the sudden death of General Sani Abacha and seizure of power by General Abdulsalami Abubakar. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) which successfully conducted the 1998/99 general elections that returned the country to democratic rule on 29th May, 1999 was set up by then Military government of General Abdulsalami Abubakar in August 1998, having dissolved NECON following his ascension to power. Although INEC conducted the 1998/99 general elections under the power conferred on it by the military decrees, the constitution that came into force on the 29th of May 1999, the day the civilian authorities assumed office retained the name INEC for the electoral management body.

The administration of elections under the 1999 constitution was envisaged as permanent and independent. The commission was defined as corporate body which may sue and be sued in its corporate name" (Electoral Act, 2006). Its members, but not its activities, were to be funded from the consolidated fund of the Federation. The constitutional requirements to hold bye elections anytime a seat in the National Assembly fell vacant clearly implied that the commission should remain permanent and ready to discharge its statutory duties (INEC Report, 2003). For its activities, the commission is to rely on the annual budget of the federal government as approved in the Appropriation Act.

The independence of the commission is derived from its structure, qualification of membership, fixed tenure of its members and the mode of appointment of its staff. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) comprises of a Chairman who is the Chief National Electoral Commissioner, 12 National Commissioners, the Secretary who is the administrative head of the body and 37 Resident Electoral Commissioners in the 36 states of the Federation including the Federal Capital Territory Abuja (Ujo 2000).

The President of the Federation by the virtue of section 154 of the constitution appoints the Chairman and all the National Commissioners. In appointing the Chairman and National Commissioners, the President and commander in Chief of the Armed Forces is required to consult with the Council of State and the appointments are subject to confirmation by the Senate (the upper house of the National Assembly). The removal of any of the member from office is regulated by section 154 of Constitution which requires that the President only act on an address supported by two third majority of the Senate praying that such a member be removed for inability to discharge the functions of the office whether arising from ill health or misconduct (FRN, 1999). It should be noted that the constitution is silent on the right of such a member to fair hearing before the Senate. The law provides that Chairman and National Commissioners should not be less than fifty and forty years of age respectively, be politically



non-partisan and be of high integrity. Members are also not allowed while serving, to hold any other office of emolument whether in federal or state public service.

On his power to make appointment or exercise disciplinary control over persons, section 158(1) of the 1999 constitution requires that the Commission should not be subject to the direction or control of any other person. Furthermore, members are not qualified for any elective office provided in the constitution until after a period of five years.

Challenges of Conducting Credible Elections

Managing of elections in Nigeria's democratic dispensation is "characterized by ineffective administration at all stages (during, before and after elections), resulting in damagingly discredited outcomes" (Omotola, 2010, p.535). There are numerous challenges that are being faced by Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in its bid to conduct free, fair and credible elections. The first being the challenge of communication and logistics which involves delays in transporting election officials and materials to the voting centers (Jinadu, 1997). This problem is more pronounced in coastal areas where the means of transportation is relatively more cumbersome that the electoral materials has to be ferried through water. There have been reported cases of the late arrival of electoral officials and materials to election centers, with voters waiting almost indefinitely resulting to weariness and frustration among voters. One of the resultant effects of this is low voter turn-out or political apathy. Many Nigerians are increasingly withdrawing from participating in elections (INEC and FES, 2011).

Another recurrent issue is the challenge of security. Elections in Nigeria as argued by some scholars are "akin to war" winners win everything, even as losers lose everything (Ake, 1996; Jega, 2013, p.9). This raises very serious security concerns including among others; physical attacks on INEC staff and facilities, attacks on security personnel on election duty, misuse of security orderlies by politicians, attacks on political opponents, intimidation of voters and destruction of election materials by hired political thugs (Jega, 2013, p.10). The Nigerian Police is constitutionally empowered to protect the lives and properties of members of the public as well as maintain law and order. And it has become customary to engage them during the electioneering process as part of their civic and constitutional responsibility.

This is even made worst by the volatile nature of Nigerian politics with all manner of violent and cult groups struggling for supremacy with links to politicians. However, owing to some of the reasons mentioned above, the security apparatus in some cases has played less than noble role during elections, thereby, raising questions about their integrity, professionalism and neutrality. Reports on elections in Nigeria indicates that some security officers with the connivance of INEC officials manipulate elections by unleashing terror and intimidation on opponents of their preferred candidates, which put a taint on the credibility of the process (Ajayi, 2006, p.62).

Another challenge confronting the management of election in Nigeria is the nature of our politics and political parties. Political parties play significant role(s) in shaping electoral politics. They are the hallmark of competitive democracy (INEC, 2012:103; Walle, 2003). For as Lindberg alluded, "modern representative democracy means party democracy" (Lindberg, 2007:215). The role(s) of political parties in a democracy include to: aggregate and articulate choices in the public space; educate the citizens to political responsibility; transform citizens by integrating them into groups through a process of socialization; exercise control over executive



arm of government especially the regime in power, constraining it to avoid the concentration and abuse of power; represent the link between government and the public; nominate candidates for public offices and provide electoral support to them during elections (Alapiki, 2004, p.91-92; Ojo, 2002, p.12; Omoruyi, 2001, p.2-4).

The nomination of candidates for election is the primary and functional role of political parties. This is rightly captured by INEC when it stated thus: “political parties function typically to present the electorate with a choice of candidates and programs from which to choose and, thereby, help periodically in the determination of which parties or coalition of parties will govern” (INEC, 2012, p.103).

By law, INEC has the duty to regulate the activities of political parties especially during the electioneering process. This includes the monitoring of political parties to encourage internal democracy during party primaries. This is where the challenge lies. The report of the Justice Muhammadu Uwais’ led Electoral Reform Committee admits and rightly so that “the structure of the political parties is such that internal democracy is virtually absent” (Electoral Reform Committee, 2008, p.26). Corroborating this, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) a US-based organization observes that “most party primaries were conducted under opaque conditions and several party leaders hand-picking many of the candidates” (NDI, 2011, p.8). Similarly, the past INEC Chairman Prof. Attahiru Jega contends that the situation is worsened by the fact that the Electoral Act 2010 (as amended) forbids INEC, “from removing a candidate from election list, once he was submitted by the party, for whatever reason, and we ended up with parties sending us people who did not even go through democratic primaries” (Jega, 2012, p.5).

Again, former President Jonathan decried the situation in another of his intervention on Nigeria’s democracy when he stated that: “As far as I know, our political parties are yet to score high marks in nominating candidates based on classic democratic principles” (Jonathan, 2013, p.24). Also, the aftermath of the Supreme Court Judgement that voided the election of Zamfara and Bayelsa State in 2020, show that political parties has contributed to the problem of managing election in Nigeria. Equally, a serving Minister of State for Niger Delta admitted that there is internal problem within the parties and there is need for the parties to put their house in order. It is perhaps this situation that led Omoruyi (2001:2) to argue that political parties in Nigeria “are just political parties in name... they are still in search of role, as their role is still fluid”.

Others have suggested that political parties, more often than not, operate like “electoral machines”: owned and funded by a few powerful individuals who behave like business men or “political entrepreneurs”, whose main driving force is to make profits and reap bonanzas in the form of contracts and political appointments (Adejumobi, 2007,p.13; Obi, 2011,p.376, 2004, p.3; Ojo, 2002, p.16). Besides, the Electoral Reform Committee contends that “There are currently 50 registered political parties in the country, most of which are an assemblage of people who share the same level of determination to use the party platform to get power. As such, it is usually difficult to identify any party programs or ideologies” (ERC, 2008,p.2).

According to INEC, lack of internal democracy in the political parties has severe implication(s) on Nigeria’s democracy as “it’s a major cause of serious cracks within their rank and file. Resistance to imposition of candidates has generally met with even more intolerance and high-handedness by party leadership, creating intra-party schisms, heightened tension and violence in the polity, including alleged assassinations” (INEC, 2012, p.107).The protracted



internal political crisis has rocked the major political parties especially the former ruling Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) in which there was two factions laying claim to the leadership of the party, namely the Senator Ahmed Makarfi-led National Caretaker Committee and the Senator Alli Modu Sheriff-led National Executive Committee (Ezigbo, 2017, This Day, 2014).

This is also evidenced in the ruling political party, the All Progressive Congress (APC), in the political tussle between the Former Governor of Zamfara State Abdullaziz Yari and former Senator Kabir Marafa of Zamfara Central, Rotimi Amaechi versus other party big wigs in Rivers State and currently the tussle between the National Chairman of APC and the Governor of Edo State to mention but a few. There are no doubts that, the crisis was connected to the challenge of lack of internal democracy in the political parties in Nigeria. The leadership tussle is a subject of litigation in the Supreme Court of Nigeria. The main incentive fueling the crisis is the inordinate quest for power to control resources. In an incisive explanation that encapsulates the nature of our politics, Ake (1996, p.7-8) avers though in a wider African context which resonates in Nigeria that:

“Politics is mainly about the control of state power... Much of what is uniquely negative about politics in Africa arises from the character of the state, particularly its lack of autonomy, the immensity of its power, its proneness to abuse, and the lack of immunity against it. The character of the state rules out a politics of moderation and mandates a politics of lawlessness and extremism for the simple reason that the nature of the state makes the capture of state power irresistibly attractive... Thus, everyone seeks power by every means, legal or otherwise and those who already control state power try to keep it by every means... Our politics is not a lawful competition to select those to manage our common concern but a fight to capture and privatize an enormous state power”.

The Nigerian state is “what some people perceive to be the centralization of control over key national resources and is the main reason for their desperate efforts to win and retain power at whatever cost” (ERC, 2008, p.2). What is more, in Nigeria as in much of Africa “elections are struggles over the access to state resources, which is the biggest prize in society. Given these high stakes, politicians resort to all sort of means-whether fair or foul-to attain public office” (Bratton, 2008, p.1). Indeed, for the political class, the quest for political power is seen as a guarantee for unlimited and uncontrollable access to the resources of the State, which is appropriated for personal use (Wapmuk, 2016, p.99).

The above has given rise to a related challenge to the conduct of credible elections, which is the lack of respect for the rule of law. Democracy is a rule bound process and it is trite that everybody and every institution ought to operate and be restrained by the law via the constitution. However, the experience since 1999 indicates that the law is observed more in the breach. Pathetically rather than the rule of law we now have the rule of men operating unchallenged in the country.

There is equally the challenge of material poverty of the majority of Nigerians. The National Bureau of Statistics reports that 72% of Nigerians are living on less than \$1 a day (NBS, 2011). Also, a report by the World Poverty Clock shows Nigeria has overtaken India as the country with the extreme poor people in the world (Yomi, 2018). According to the National Planning Commission (NPC), “the unemployed population is at present, dominated by the youths



who are mostly school leavers with senior secondary school qualifications and graduates of tertiary institutions” (NPC, 2014, p.8). Poverty makes the electorate susceptible, although not necessarily to the unwholesome influence of money (Jinadu, 1997:3). Indeed, poverty subverts and disembowels democracy and corrupts the electoral process through excessive monetization of politics (Ake, 1996, p.10; Bratton, 2008). In the words of Jega, “the role of money in Nigerian politics is very significant... The negative impact of vote buying is widely recognized” (Jega, 2012:8). Bratton argues that Nigerian politicians or their agents “usually offered money” for their votes. Moreover, the incidence of vote buying is more prevalent among the poor. Even electoral officers are corrupted with money or other gratifications (Bratton 2008, p.4-6). For as Ake (1996, p.11) poignantly argued that in “accepting money” or “bribe” for their votes the poor “collude in commoditizing their democratic right and reinforce their subordination, thus turning election into bondage”.

The above narrations captured the reality of the day on our democratic system and have negative impact on governance. Hence meritocracy, competency have no place in our electoral system. Elections are conducted through vote buying. Poverty has taken a center stage and majority of youths do compromise during election, the implication of this is bad governance and a serious setback to the process of development of the country as no one holds government to account.

Additionally, there is the challenge of the reliance by INEC on ad-hoc personnel which most often is hurriedly assembled and poorly trained on their nature of duties. It is observed that “insufficient time for training did not allow for proper assessment of personnel before deployment to the field” (Omotola, 2010, p.542; INEC, 2012, p.11). This challenge not only reinforces the problem of rudimentary development of institutional capacity but also opens INEC to all manner of external influences by forces whose interests in some instances are at variance with that of the electoral body. For instance, in every election in Nigeria, INEC do recruit ad-hoc Staff as collation and returning officers. Managing these ad-hoc staff constitutes a huge challenge to INEC as some of them may be card-carrying members of the competing political parties and may unduly influence the election outcomes in favor of the political parties of their affiliation.

These scenarios depict some of the challenges confronting INEC in the Management of elections in Nigeria. The pertinent question now is what should be done or what are the prospectsof making Nigeria’s electoral process and by extension the democratic process more credible and acceptable? This is necessary as credible election remains a veritable instrument in nation building, democratic consolidation among other benefits.In response to this question, and given the identifiable pitfalls in electoral outcomes in Nigeria, the prospects lies in the need for drastic action in a bid to address the electoral malaise in the country.

May be the best point to begin is for electoral management body make adequate preparation for the prompt delivery of electoral materials ahead of time, preferably a week before the election. This on its own will address the challenge of communication and logistic. Doing so will ensure the commencement and conclusion of voting within the stipulated time and as well reduce the level of stress and apathy on the part of the electorates.

There is also need for institutional reengineering couple with attitudinal and behavioral changes on the part of all actors and electoral stakeholders. This should start from the security



personnel who should be educated on their role in the provision of security for both the officials and the voters without resort to intimidation and compromise. They should also be trained on how to contain the excesses of political thugs and as well stop them from ballot stuffing and snatching. Nigerians must raise their voices high to any act of irregularities emanated from any angle irrespective of the political party, a development which will put these electoral vices in check.

Government must ensure the independence and neutrality of the electoral management body by providing for their full financial autonomy in the discharge of their duties without influence from any arm of government. This will be one of the fundamental prerequisites for a truly free and fair election and the establishment of true democracy in Nigeria. It is imperative that the credibility of the electoral process will be considerably enhanced if INEC is fair and gives equal access and treatment to all participants in the electoral process. Credible democratic election implies, “freedom from coercion and fairness as the correlate of impartiality”.

Civil Society Organizations should be opportune to participate fully and freely in any election in the country particularly in the area of election monitoring. Cases of molestation, harassment and intimidation of both Election Observers and Journalists should be discouraged in its entirety. There will be a positive drive towards democratic consolidation if the civil societies are empowered to perform their role as electoral watchdogs. The implementation of these measures will guarantee a better prospect for a free, fair and credible elections in Nigeria.

Conclusion

This paper examined the challenges and prospects of election management in Nigeria’s nascent democracy. There is widespread belief, backed by intimidating evidence that the quality of elections has been nosediving with successive elections as was the in the 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019 general elections. Though longstanding, the deepening crisis of electoral governance in Nigeria has recently assumed epidemic proportions, creating an urgent need for electoral reform” (Omotola, 2011:188). Even INEC whilst assessing its own performance observes that, “there is widespread negative perception of INEC and its capacity to conduct elections” (INEC, 2011, p.2; INEC, 2012; INEC and FES Report, 2011).

Indeed, “many Nigerians regard most elections in the country as having been marred by the partisanship of the electoral body... the manipulation of votes... especially by the political class” (Adamu, 2015, p.17). The electoral reform more than any other thing is predicated on the fact “that no democracy would survive for too long outside a credible electoral system” (Ogbodo, 2016).

To underscore the necessity for reforms, it is worth stating that, “The country’s elections were without doubt the most cynical illustration of the exasperation of the country’s ruling elite with the electorate” (Adebanwi and Obadare, 2011, p.323). Records indicate that “every election seemed a step backwards in Nigeria’s search for democratic consolidation” (Omotola, 2009, p.195). Indeed, on record it is generally acknowledged that “the 2007 and 2019 elections were manifestly the worst in Nigeria’s history, as declared by both domestic and international observers” (Jega, 2015, p.2, Omala, 2019, p.18). It is however our belief that a committed implementation of these recommendations will definitely assist the electoral umpire in the proper management of elections in the country in way that will guarantee a free, fair and not only credible but acceptable elections in the country.





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