Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies (SGOJAHDS), Vol.4 No.2 June, 2021; p.g. 192 – 198; ISSN: 2695-2319 (Print); ISSN: 2695-2327 (Online)

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA: SELECTION OR ELECTION

EZEAJUGHU MARY C. (PhD)
Department of Political Science
Faculty of Social Sciences
Tansian University, Umunya, Anambra State

Abstract

Elections and institutions that carry out electoral processes are not only central to the entire democratic system, but also attract significant attention because they facilitate the process of legitimizing leadership. This they do through voting processes and through also facilitating the systematic acquisition and transfer of political power. This chapter focuses on the presidential elections and its transparency in making it more of an election than of a selection. Ordinary Nigerians' experience with government since independence in 1960 has by and large been characterized by corruption, violence and abuse. This was especially true under the succession of military dictators that ruled Nigeria for 30 of its first 39 years of independence. The era of political parties taking people for granted is gone. Nigerians are very conscious of their rights; they know with their votes is they can install or remove government that failed to perform. This article therefore recommends that in order for the electoral system to be free and fair, there is need for government to place priority on education through free and compulsory education, Avoid inflammatory rhetoric, publicly denounce violence, pledge to respect rules, in particular the Code of Conduct for Political Parties, and pursue grievances through lawful channels, it also indicate that the sovereign power belongs to the people.

KEYWORDS: Presidential Elections, Candidate Selection, Political Parties, Rigging, Voting.

Introduction

Elections in Nigeria cannot be thought of without political parties as there is no provision for independent candidacy in the country's constitution. Political parties remain the only forum in Nigeria for democratically elected leaders to emerge. The idea of political party's candidate selection process enjoys unrivalled eminence in political discourses and analyses in Nigeria. However, party primaries and conventions are mere platforms of voice affirmation of elite's consensus, which most times renders candidate selection process less credible and reliable. General Abdulsalami Abubakar came into office as the Head of State following the death of General Sani Abacha in June 1998. On 20 July 1998 General Abubakar announced a detailed plan for the restoration of a democratic, civilian government by 29 May 1999. He emphasised democracy, respect for human rights and the early withdrawal of the military from politics. He established INEC, which announced a timetable for elections, beginning with local elections on 5 December 1998 and culminating in Presidential elections on 27 February 1999.
In the first presidential elections organised under a civilian administration on 19 April 2003, President Olusegun Obasanjo was re-elected with 61.9 percent of the vote. His closest challenger, General Muhammadu Buhari of the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) obtained 31.2% of the vote.

A Commonwealth Observer Group, headed by former Tanzanian Prime Minister and former OAU Secretary-General Dr Salim Ahmed Salim, was present for the above elections. The Group concluded that "in most of Nigeria, despite significant challenges, a genuine and largely successful effort was made to enable the people to vote freely and that in most of the country conditions were such as to enable the will of the people to be expressed. However, there were parts of Nigeria in which many Nigerians were denied the right to participate in an authentic democratic process". In the post-election analysis, electoral observers reported a number of irregularities that had been seen. For example, observers reported instances of ballot box stuffing, including polling sites where INEC officials or party agents illegally printed multiple ballots with their own thumbs. In some states in the South South zone, actual voter turnouts were significantly lower than the official tally. In some states delegates estimated that less than 10 per cent of registered voters cast ballots, but official turnout rates for those same states exceeded 85 per cent. Many individual polling sites recorded that all 500 registered voters had cast ballots when observers actually saw fewer than 100 people there during the day.

The Scale of Political Violence

Nigeria's general elections took place has witnessed lots of killings in election-related violence with many more injured. Similar problems are again emerging in many areas. As early as December 2006 one international organization monitoring conflict in Nigeria warned that "The use of thugs by politicians and groups has not abated…Allegations and denials of politically-sponsored violence have been rife and people are concerned that the electoral process may be sliding towards a repeat of the 2003 experience." The trend towards violence has since continued to build.

The run-up to Nigeria's elections has been violent, with campaigning in many areas beset by political killings, bombings and armed clashes between supporters of rival political factions. This violence forms part of a broader pattern of violence and abuse that is inherent in Nigeria's largely unaccountable political system. Nigeria's epidemic of political violence has human rights implications beyond its immediate toll in human lives. As the U.N. Human Rights Committee has spelt out, fundamental to fair elections is that "voters should be able to form opinions independently, free of violence or threat of violence". Violence, actual and threatened, restricts the ability of ordinary voters to participate. Electoral Acts and the rules of the Independent National Electoral Commission are also important elements of legal frameworks binding candidate selection and conduct of primaries. It was asserted that the INEC is the second most important institutional design guiding party politics in Nigeria; it is constitutionally authorized to monitor all party operations in the country ranging from registration and mode of conducting primaries. These rules are thus provided through electoral acts, which are usually provided prior to the conduct of elections such as the 2002, 2006, 2010 and 2014 acts used for 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019 elections respectively.

There were 18 registered political parties in Nigeria. The main parties are the APC and the main opposition party, the PDP. Nigeria's political landscape changed significantly when the APC was formed in 2013 merging Nigeria's three largest opposition groups. Political parties in Nigeria have a dialogue mechanism called the Inter-Party Advisory Committee (IPAC). Ahead of the elections, the IPAC met regularly. Both the APC and the PDP informed the Pre-Election Assessment team and the Observer Group that they have been attending the IPAC

meetings, albeit with differing opinions on its usefulness in engaging and agreeing on critical issues.

Understanding the Candidate Selection Process

In Nigeria, matters relating to internal party democracy and political inclusion are well spelt out in regulatory mechanisms such as the Nigerian Constitution, Party Constitutions, the Electoral Act, Party Manifestos, etc. These laws are legal instruments for guiding the conduct and behavior of actors in the affairs of parties. For example, Article 1 of the INEC Regulations for the Conduct of Political Party Primaries for the nominations of candidates into various positions provides that:

A political party seeking to participate in any election organized by the commission (INEC) must conduct primaries, wherein all eligible members of the party must be given equal opportunity to participate in the primaries of the party for the purpose of selecting candidates for elective positions. However, Nigerian political parties do not comply with this proviso. Instead, they create rules and/or impose conditions that exclude the underrepresented groups from emerging as candidates. This is in spite of Article 2 of the INEC Regulations for the Conduct of Political Party Primaries, which provides that, "political parties must not create rules or impose conditions or set high expression of interest or nomination fee that could exclude aspirants on the basis of sex, religion, ethnicity, and circumstance of birth or wealth". The culture of candidate imposition through consensus is now becoming a norm in Nigeria. For example, the APC constitution (as amended in 2014) provides that all positions of the party, as well as all nominations must be done democratically in line with the provision of its own constitution. Article 20 (ia) particularly states that:

"All party posts prescribed or implied by this Constitution shall be filled by democratically conducted elections at the respective National Convention or Congress subject, where possible, to consensus, provided that where a candidate has emerged by consensus for an elective position, a vote of "yes" or "no" by ballot or voice shall be called, to ensure that it was not an imposition which could breed discontent and crisis"

However, despite such laudable legalistic constructs and acknowledged importance of selecting candidates through primaries, the party is not devoid of internal crisis; it has in fact been riddled with an avalanche and tales of conflicts and litigations accruing from the gap between theory and practice. In 2003, internal conflict in the PDP revolved majorly around Obasanjo's second term bid and his hegemonic control over the party structures. Events in the 2007 elections revolved around Obasanjo‟s third term presidential ambition, Atiku's presidential ambition, Yar'Adua's consequent selection and other cases of intra-party rifts. Within these unfolding events, candidate imposition and political sabotage were clearly evident. Obasanjo, who was at the time president and towards the end of his presidential tenure declared the election a do-or-die affair, which was in relation to his third term ambition, Alumona and Obianyo (2014) stated that Atiku Abubakar used the People's Democratic Movement (PDM) as his formidable political machine to ensure the victory and defeat of certain candidates within the party and also to plot the nullification of Obasanjo‟s third term presidential ambition. In retaliation, Obasanjo sabotaged Atiku and his supporter‟s registration, forcing Atiku‟s defection to the Action Congress (AC), later Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), to pursue his presidential candidate. Following his defection, other members

of the party witnessed harassments and forceful withdrawal from the presidential race, which led to the emergence of Umaru Musa Yar'Adua as the presidential candidate, which also blossomed into crisis; According to Irem (2006), the process leading to the emergence of Yar' Adua was not truly democratic because there seemed to be an undemocratic consensus by leaders of the party prior to the convention in his favour.

Emerging Violence in Relation to the Presidential Election Campaigns

Many observers have expressed concern that the pattern of violence seen during Presidential elections in Nigeria before, during and after the primary process is an indication of things to come on and around Election Day. As an official with one western election monitoring group put it, "[w]e worry that what we saw in the primaries was the canary in the coal mine…it could get a lot worse when the elections get closer. Many politicians have actively recruited and armed gangs of youth in preparation for the elections. In some cases they have purchased imported weaponry including automatic rifles for their proxy militias; others rely on locally-manufactured firearms originating predominantly from southeastern Nigeria. Arms imported for the use of political thugs in the run-up to Nigeria's 2003 elections have continued to fuel violence and insecurity in the intervening years, especially in the volatile Niger Delta region.

A global authority on the subject of election malpractices, electoral malpractices could occur in three principal ways, namely:

- Manipulating the design of institutions governing elections to the advantage of one or more electoral contestants in violation of the principles of inclusivity, impartiality, openness or transparency, such as through gerrymandering, mal-apportionment, over-restrictive franchise or candidacy regulations.
- Campaign regulations that lead to inequalities among contestants.
- Lack of observer access to electoral processes.

The Nigerian State and Unbridled Election Rigging

The penchant for violence and election rigging in Nigeria's electoral democracy needs to be understood in terms of the character of the Nigerian state and its aversion to transparency and accountability in the electoral process. Indeed, there is a running battle between primordialist forces and progressives over the ownership of the state. The character of the Nigerian state and society is fundamentally anarchical, mainly as a result of the multiplicity of ethnic groups and the political economy of the entity. Election rigging, the sit-tight attitude of leaders, money politics, and electoral violence are some of the greatest challenges to democracy and democratization in Africa.

The only evidence of the presence of democracy today is the regular conduct of elections. But elections must be conducted in a manner that is not only "free and fair" but also be seen to be so for it to pass as democratic. The principles of electoral democratic abhor electoral malpractices, irregularities, and rigging. Therefore, compliance with democratic norms in the contest signifies electoral democracy whereas the reverse is the case for election rigging. One of the new dimensions of malpractices is Nigeria's recent electoral experience is *vote buying,* this makes our elections to be more of *Selections*. Though Nigerians are no strangers to election rigging and malpractices, the subject matter of vote buying has generated many discussions in the Nigerian public space and the academia since 2015. The prevalence of vote buying and

selling made election observer and monitoring group, Youth Initiative for Advocacy, Growth, and Advancement (YIAGA Africa) to describe the phenomenon as a new way of election rigging by politicians in Nigeria. Also, Osita Okechukwu, director-general of the Voice of Nigeria says vote-buying in elections signify the end of the era of "writing election results in hotels". Nigeria's elections have usually been affected by incidents of vote-buying and selling by political parties and their candidates. Though, many people have attributed the phenomenon to the country's rising poverty profile, desperation among politicians to undermine the electoral process arising from the introduction of stricter measures against ballot snatching and other "traditional" means of rigging elections, decisive role of money in politics, and the country's weak enforcement of electoral laws; there seem to be no consensus whether or not vote buying constitute an electoral offence. To further complicate the issue, the electoral umpire, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) says it lacks the constitutional power to arrest and investigate politicians involved in vote buying despite its consistent assurances that it will tackle the menace. Invariably, vote buying is a binding contract, or perhaps an auction in which the voter sells his or her vote to the highest bidder. Vote buying is defined here as any form of financial, material or promissory inducement or reward by a candidate, political party, agent or supporter to influence a voter to cast his or her vote or even abstain from doing so in order to enhance the chances of a particular contestant to win an election. Thus, any practice of immediate or promised reward to a person for voting or refraining from voting in a particular way can be regarded as vote buying.

The Manifestations of Vote Buying in Elections in Nigeria (2015-2019)

Vote buying has been an integral element of money politics in Nigeria. As shown in Table 2 below, vote buying manifests in several ways including the offer of cash, purchase of permanent voter cards (PVCs), food items, TraderMoni (a government's social investment policy), and the deliberate violations of the Electoral Act by politicians. Our content analysis of five leading Nigerian news platforms shows their coverage. Vote buying takes the electoral system to be like a typical market place where the politicians, political parties, and party agents are the vote buyers while prospective voters are the sellers. The commodity on sale is the vote to be cast while the medium of exchange could be monetary and non-monetary items. The leadership of Nigeria's police force also does not appear to be alive to the need to avert reprisals against ordinary voters on and around Election Day. Numerous Nigerian civil society groups are concerned that communities whose members are organizing themselves as part of a nationwide "mandate protection" effort could be especially vulnerable; the role of those community members will be to publicly question and challenge any perceived attempt to hijack the voting in their communities.

Effects of Vote Buying

Vote buying shuts out candidates with lean campaign budgets. By this, there will be an increase in political corruption. This will mean that electoral victories are purchased rather than won fairly, it obviously leads to state capture. It equally compromises the credibility, legitimacy, and integrity of elections and its institutions. Vote buying undermines the integrity of elections as the winners are often the highest bidders and not necessarily the most popular or credible contestants. It often leads to protests and blames trading among parties and candidates after elections thereby discrediting the process. It, therefore, discourages conscientious people from participating in electoral politics and causes citizens to lose faith in state institutions. Vote trading equally has a tendency to perpetuate bad governance. It not

only compromises the wellbeing of those who sold their vote for instant gratification but also the future of those who did not sell their votes but are inevitably exposed to bad governance that results from such a fraudulent process. For every vote traded, there are many people who will suffer the unintended consequences when the traded votes make the difference between winning and losing in the election. The main effect of vote buying in elections especially on the Nigerian general elections is that it will always undermine political legitimacy and make a joke of the Nigerian two-decade of the democratic experiment. In addition to this, it will create a fundamental moral burden on citizens to demand good governance from politicians who have previously bought their ways into offices and the legitimacy of future elections.

Conclusion

When election is not managed quite satisfactorily, it can pave the way for deeper ethnic and regional divisions, lost of legitimacy of elected authorities, protest, violent contestation, social explosion, and doubt about institutions, violence, and instability or even threaten the entire democratization process. In fact, poor management of elections is a real and prolific source of conflicts, violence, insecurity and instability. The candidate selection process in Nigeria's political parties is typically abused and manipulated by party financiers (godfathers). Parties' inability to raise funds from within makes parties prone to being hijacked by party godfathers. This, in turn, diminishes internal party democracy and political inclusion. The concept of party supremacy, which underscores the absolute control of the affairs of a party by its leaders who are elected by the majority of its members is no longer tenable in Nigeria. Despite the problems that have underpinned elections in Nigeria, the fact is that a democratic political system has been introduced and efforts should be made to consolidate it primarily by way of ensuring good governance. This is the only premise upon which development can be attained. Democracy upholds the tenets of good governance. There has been a concerted action by the government in recent times, strongly supported by the vocal civil society, against corruption and backed by determined leadership. If these actions are sustained, then, Nigeria is on the march towards achieving good governance and reaping the benefits of democratic elections.

Recommendations

There must be an end to the culture of impunity for those committing electoral offences. The prosecution of such offences needs to be effective and timely, ensuring that serious breaches of the Electoral Act and any noncompliance with relevant Codes of Conduct are dealt with appropriately. The government should direct publicly all officers to ensure neutrality in relations with all parties and apply exemplary sanctions against any officer who fails to comply. The politicians should avoid inflammatory rhetoric, publicly denounce violence, pledge to respect rules, in particular the Code of Conduct for Political Parties, and pursue grievances through lawful channels. A mechanism should be put in place to increase women's participation as candidates in elections. The political parties should respect party constitutions and particularly allow democratic candidate selections. The existing timeframe as recommended by INEC for a re-run of the Presidential election should be increased. Also, the age limit for one to stand for election to the National Assembly should be reduced to recognize the contribution of youth to society, to encourage and broaden their participation.

The federal government should also look in the direction of reviewing the electoral law, particularly, Section 87 of the Electoral Act to include conferring on INEC the power to reject candidates not properly selected on the basis of its monitoring reports. This should also

include defining specific issues like aspirants/candidates and timelines for disposal of cases. INEC should be granted the power to recognise winners that emerged through credible party primaries only.

References

Eya, Nduka (2003). *Electoral Process, Electoral Malpractices and Electoral Violence*. Enugu: Sages Publications Nigeria.

Dudley, B (1982). *An Introduction to Nigerian Government and Politics*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press

Garuba, Dauda (2007). "*Transition without Change: Elections and Political (In)stability in Nigeria*." In Jega Attahiru & Ibeanu, Okechukwu (eds.) *Elections and the Future of Democracy in Nigeria.* Nigerian Political Science Association (NPSA).

Human Rights Watch, (2007). 'Nigeria: Polls Marred by Violence, Fraud', The Guardian, 19 April.

Nwabueze Ben,(2007). *2007 Election Violated Our Constitution, So Nobody Can Legitimately Govern us Based on Them*, Sunday Champion, 3 June.

Hounkpe, Mathias & Gueye, Alioune Badara (2010). The *Role of Security Forces in the Electoral Process*: the Case of Six West African Countries. Abuja: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

Ibrahim, Jibrin, (2007). Nigeria's 2007 Elections: *The Fitful Path to Democratic Citizenship*, United States Institute of Peace, Special Report 182, January.

Igbuzor, O.,(2005). *Perspectives on Democracy and Development*, Abuja: Joe-Tolalu and Associates.

Ihonvbere, O. Julius, (1999). '*The 1999 Presidential Elections in Nigeria:* The Unresolved Issues', Issue: A Journal of Opinion, Vol. 27 No. 1 1999.

International Republican Institute (IRI), 2003, Nigeria Election Observer Report, (http:// aceproject.org/ero-en/regions/africa/NG/nigeria-final-report-general-elections-iri-) 2003, 18 September.

Sklar, R (1963). *Nigerian Political Parties: Power in an Emergent African Nation*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

The Guardian 2003.'*Overall Nigerian Presidential Election Result*', Wednesday, 23 April. Yusuf, Afolabi, 2002, 'Election 2003 and Ethnic Militias', Daily Champion, 23 January.

The Centre for Public Policy Alternative (CPPA) (2015). 2015 *Presidential Election Outcome*: *Analysis and implication*. pp. 1-5.