



## **NEXUS BETWEEN ELECTIONS, GOOD GOVERNANCE AND DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA: 1922-1979**

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### **Abstract**

That election is at the heart of democracy and democratization process has become widely acknowledged. Election performs indispensable roles and thereby remains central to the whole essence of democratic process. However, experience has shown that democratic process in Africa and the developing states in general collapse on the altar of bungled elections and electoral processes. Such failure can be easily traced to the doorstep of the institution saddled with the responsibility of managing the electoral process. This is because of the direct linkages that exist between electoral process and the managing institution. Indeed, it has been widely asserted that more than anything, the quality and credibility of elections depend greatly on the extent of competency and viability of the electoral institutions. No state shows better the strong relationship between elections and managing agency than Nigeria. Looking back at the Nation's history it is glaring that past efforts at democratization collapsed due to the failure of electoral commissions to conduct credible elections. It is however, saddening that election managers in Nigeria have failed to learn from history. The problem faced by past commissions, continues to beset present electoral institution, while past shortcomings continues to manifest. The paper, however, in its attempt to explicate the crisis of governance and comatose democracy in Nigeria, focuses on the nation's inability to conduct credible, acceptable, and fair elections. It tries to establish a nexus between election, good governance and democracy by arguing that democracy is inconceivable outside the context of rule-based, fair and credible election as election supplies the essential platform and vitality for the building of democracy. The paper therefore posited that until Nigeria is able to put in place a robust, transparent and credible electoral process, the country will continue to experience governance devoid of all the fundamental trappings of a sustainable democracy.

## INTRODUCTION

The history of elections in Nigeria's efforts at democratization has been a chequered one. (Adejumobi, 2007) Since independence, conducting election in the nation's democratization efforts has been an exercise in futility. This is because elections in the country have been marred by fraudulent practices, corruption and violence. It is therefore of little surprise that past efforts at democratization have collapsed at the altar of perverted elections and electoral process. (Nnoli, 2003) So bad has the situation been that the period of election has come to be associated with violence and politically motivated crises. The fact that politics has been seen as a money making venture in Nigeria, has greatly helped in making election in the country a do or die affair. This is why some have seen the electoral process in Nigeria as a war-like process. (Ntalaja, 2000)

While a great deal of the problems confronting elections and electoral process in the nation's democratic history can be linked to behavioural and attitudinal dispositions of the political elite, a substantial portion of the blame must also be placed at the door-step of institutions that have been saddled with the responsibility of conducting elections. The corollary of this is that, the various electoral bodies the country has had have not been as independent of the government of the day as the nature of their job requires. (Diamond, 2002) Indeed, they have not been transparent and impartial in their activities, nor were they responsive to the yearnings of the other stakeholders in the society. Reflecting on the situation in the first republic, Kalu Ezera described the performance of ECN as not only partial, but grossly incompetent. (Ezera, 1964) The unpalatable situation mentioned above as noted by Ntalaja, have hampered the establishment of a credible and virile democratic system. (Ntalaja, 2000)

## CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

### Democracy

Democracy is a concept that does not have any universally accepted definition. In spite of the differences in conceptualization and practices, all version of democracy in the view of Osaghae (1992:40), share one fundamental objective of “how to govern the society in such a way that power actually belongs to all people”. Chafe (1994) argued that democracy is the involvement of the people in the running the political, socio-economic and cultural affairs of their society. The degree of involvement of the people in the total control of their polity, within the standard of natural justices, determines the degree of democratic substance of a political system (Sadeeq, 2008: 250). This shows that the peculiar virtue of democracy is thought to lie in the fact that it is only government that can advance the interests of all the members of a politically organized community (Barry, 1992).

Schumpeter (1990) defined democracy as an institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide, by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote. Competitive struggle, according to this definition, is that individual can take advantage of whatever loopholes they perceived in their opponents’ political strategy and thereby rise to power. Held (1982) conceptualized democracy as a cluster of rules and institutions permitting the broader participation of the majority of citizens in the selection of representatives who govern them. In the course of summation of varied definitions of democracy, it is deduces that democracy provides opportunities for the people to freely exercise their franchise in the selection of their representatives and leader. This type of exercise, excluded the use of force and coercion through the state apparatus.

The point being made is that, democracy can be seen as a political system that is characterized of periodic and free elections in which politicians arranged into political parties that engage themselves in a competitive polls to ensure a standing government, where the political right will enable all adult citizens (18 years and above as it applied in Nigeria) to vote and be voted for.

### **Electoral Democracy**

According to Freedom House (2008c, pp. 9-10), to qualify as an “electoral democracy”, a country must meet the underlisted criteria which is considered as the minimum standard.

The first is what he calls competitive, multiparty political system. Others are; universal adult suffrage for all citizens, and that there should be a significant public access to the electorate by major political parties. This access is to be achieved via the media and open political campaign. The last criterion Free House mentioned is that; there must be regular elections and that the elections must be secret ballot, and devoid of large scale fraud. Finally, Freedom House opines that the election must represent the will of the people.

Going by the position of Freedom House, every *liberal democracy* also is an *electoral democracy*, but not every electoral democracy qualifies as a liberal democracy. This is because liberal democracy demands sufficient democracy standards, and not only minimum standards. Liberal democracy goes beyond the minimum standards of an electoral democracy. The corollary of it all is that a liberal democracy manifests more tenets of democracy than an electoral democracy. In the own words of Freedom House (2008c, p. 10):

‘electoral democracy’ differs from ‘liberal democracy’ in that the latter also implies the presence of a substantial array of civil

liberties. In the survey, all free countries qualify as both electoral and liberal democracies. By contrast, some Partly Free countries qualify as electoral, but not liberal, democracies". The *Freedom in the World* survey 2008 by Freedom House indicates all together 121 electoral democracies in 2007; by contrast, in the same year 2007, there were only 90 free countries, i.e. liberal democracies (Freedom House, 2008g).

Freedom House's *Map of Freedom 2008* visualizes the global distribution of free, partly free and not free countries around mid-2007. Several scholars paraphrase western democracies typically as manifestations of liberal democracy. Here, again, Fukuyama (1989, p. 4) could be quoted prominently, when he claims: "... but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government." Fukuyama's conceptual paradigm reinforces the conceptual framework of Freedom House. Other scholars are more inclined to distinguish between different types of western democracies, offering typologies for a patterning. Arend Lijphart (1984, pp. 1-36) focuses on comparing majoritarian (the so-called *Westminster Model of Democracy*) and consensus (*Consensus Model of Democracy*) types of governments. Michael Sodaro (2004, p. 48) clusters western democracies based on the degree of development of their social welfare systems: "The United States usually leans toward liberal democracy (though it also provides numerous social welfare benefits), whereas most West European countries typically lean toward social democracy (though they also provide basic political and economic liberties)". Laza Kekic from the Economist Intelligence Unit's Index of Democracy asserts that the criteria of Freedom House for a liberal democracy are not substantially different from the criteria for an electoral democracy: "The Freedom House definition of political freedom is somewhat (though not much) more demanding than its criteria for electoral democracy" (Kekic, 2008, p. 1).

## **PRE-INDEPENDENCE ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA**

The beginning of election in Nigeria lies in the 1922 Clifford Constitution. The constitution introduced four (4) elective seats. The elections were restricted to Lagos (3 seats) and Calabar (1 seat) Franchise was limited to specified income levels and residency in Lagos and Calabar. Political parties as The Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) dominated the political landscape until 1938 when the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) formerly Lagos Youth Movement dislodged it. Elections to the council, continued till the 1946 Richard's Constitution. (Osaghae, 1998; Coleman, 1986; 196-198, 218)

However, the first nationwide election in Nigeria was that of 1951 under the Macpherson Constitution. Apart from Lagos, the election was indirect. The Native Authorities elected members to the provincial level, which met and selected members to the Regional Houses of Assembly. The Regional Assemblies in turn chose members to the Central House of Representatives. The A.G., NPC, NCNC and NEPU, were the main parties that contested the elections. The NPC won a decisive majority in the Northern Region, and the NCNC in the Eastern Region. However, neither the NCNC nor the AG had a clear majority in the Western Region. Later on, through cross carpeting, the A. G. membership of the Western House, became 60 out of the 80 seats thus becoming the majority party. (Ikelegbe, 2004)

In addition, the first extensive direct election was the 1954 federal elections. The only exception was the Northern region where the election was indirect. The NPC won majority of seats in the Northern region, and had the highest seats among the parties (97 out of 184) in the House of Representatives. (Amadu, 1983) The NCNC won majorities in the Eastern and Western regions, the majority of Ministers in the executive council and a close second to the NPC in the

House of Representatives. The NPC's parliamentary leader, Tafawa Balewa became the leader of the Executive Council and later in 1957 was appointed Prime Minister. (Osaghae, 1998)

Although the 1959 federal election was quite crucial in several respects, it is however still among the pre-independence elections, it was crucial because it was the first nationwide direct elections, and also, its winner would form the first post-independence government. The election was therefore vigorously fought for, as attested to by the vigorous campaigns of the parties. The Action Group and NCNC campaigned in all parts of the nation and aligned with minority parties. This contrasts with the NPC that was content with restricting themselves to the North. The A.G aligned with UMBC and NCNC with NEPU. (Osaghae, 1998)

Apart from these major parties, several other associations or political parties and independent candidates contested the election. They include the Mabolaje, Igala Union and Niger Delta Congress. The voter turnout was heavy, with the minimum being 71.3% in the western region (Amadu, 1983). No party won a simple majority in the House of Representatives. The NPC did not win a single seat outside their region. As a result of this, the NPC (43%) and the NCNC (28.5%) formed a coalition government, in which NPC's Tafawa Balewa became the Prime Minister, and the NCNC provided the Governor-General and President of Senate. The A.G became the federal opposition. (Osaghae, 1998)

## **1964 GENERAL ELECTIONS**

The 1964 general election was unique in several respects. First it was the first federal election in an independent Nigeria. Second, many political parties, politicians and Nigerians, were quite frustrated with the state of affairs, and wanted a change. Third, the NCNC, a faction of the AG and others were frustrated with the coalition government and the 1962/63 Census, and

formed a coalition with NEPU, UMBC and Nigerian socialist, workers and farmers party to form United Progressive Grand Alliance. The NPC in response formed the Nigerian National Alliance with NNDP, Midwest Democratic Party (MDF), Dynamic Party and Republican Party. The campaigns for the election were characterized by violence, conflicts and hostility, UPGA campaigners and candidates including electoral officials were assaulted and kidnapped. (Nnoli, 2003) There were lots of irregularities, violence, fraud, thuggery, molestations, resignation of electoral officials and fraudulently returned unopposed candidates, that the UPGA decided to boycott the elections. The boycott was effective in the East and partly in the Midwest in the West; as only a 23% voter turnout was recorded. (Amadu, 1983)

The boycott resulted in an over whelming victory for the NNA which won a majority, 201 seats out of the 312 in the House of Representatives. The UPGA had only 109 seats and only 2 from independent candidates. A constitutional crisis erupted because the President, Nnamdi Azikwe refused to appoint Tafawa Balewa as Prime Minister. His reason revolved around boycott and violence that attended the elections. (Nnoli, 2003) It took the intervention of senior members of the judiciary before the matter was resolved. This resulted in a broad based government headed by Tafawa Balewa. It is noteworthy that the 1964 elections, the crises that followed it and the persistence of all-feelings, were major factors in the collapse of the first republic. (Osaghae, 1998)

While it has been noted, that the importance of elections differs across States of the world and indeed from one election to another, yet elections are always held under known stipulated regulations. Such regulations guiding the conduct of elections most often clarify issue of eligibility, legal inhibition and the condition that must be put in place for an election to the



adjudged free and fair, Of all institutional conditionalities necessary [‘or a credible electoral process three appear more prominent. (Amadu, 1983) These according to Edigheji are an independent judiciary, an independent, competent, credible and nonpartisan electoral body and a developed system of political parties. (Edigheji, 2006)

While a developed system of political parties are necessary instrument for competitive elections and an independent judiciary essential for the resolution of electoral disputes an independent competent and non-partisan electoral commission, being the body that is constitutionally charged with the duties of conducting credible elections is of greater importance to the whole electoral process. This is due to the fact that the quality and credibility of elections are directly related to the competency of the organizing institution. Electoral body must not only be independent transparent in the conduct of its activities and impartial, but must also be seen and trusted to be so by all actors involved in the electoral process. Aside these it must be competent enough as to discharge its constitutionally assigned duties with minimal or no institutional, structural and financial hindrances. Without a vibrant, competent and strong electoral institution, the conduct of the electoral process would be seriously flawed and the whole democratization process thrown into disrepute. (Ikelegbe, 1988)

## **THE ELECTION OF THE SECOND REPUBLIC**

As part of the Obasanjo transition to civil democracy in 1979, general elections were held to the state houses of Assembly state governorship, House of Representatives, Senate and the Presidency. This was in line with the constitution of 1979 five parties contested the elections, four years later, in 1983 another general elections was held that was contested by six political parties. (Amadu, 1983)

The campaigns for the 1979 elections were intense. They revolved around food and shelter (NPN) and free education and medical services (UPN). The programmes of the other parties were less specific. The campaigns of the UPN and NPP also revolve around the personalities of Awolowo and Azikwe respectively. The NPN and UPN fielded candidates in most constituencies in the country. In spite of the military regime's supervision, and national spread requirement, religion and ethnicity were still used to gain advantage and certain of the party's support base were ethnic. The average voter turnout was low, ranging between 20% in Kano to 43% in Anambra. (Amadi, 1983).

The election result revealed that the NPN led the other parties in all the elections. It won the governorship of seven states 136 Senate seats, 168 House of Representative seats and the presidential elections. The UPN followed with 5 states, 28 Senate seats, 111 House of Representatives seats, and came second in the presidential elections. The NPP won 3 states, 16 Senators and 78 Representatives, while the GNPP had 8 Senators, 43 Representative and 2 States. The PRP had 2 states governors, 7 Senators, and 49 Representatives. (Amadu, 1983)

As the elections progressed, and the pattern of NPN leadership emerged, the other parties styled the progressives attempted collaboration through a formula for supporting the strongest progressive party in a state. Some parties particularly the UPN and GNPP withdraw from some elections and directed their candidates to vote for collaboration parties. However, they could not agree on common candidates particularly in the presidential elections. The UPN and GNPP challenged the NPN declared victory in the Supreme Court. This pertained to the interpretation of two thirds of 19 states as provided in the constitution. Shehu Shagari, the NPN candidate won one quarter of the votes in  $12^{2/2}$  of the 19 states. (Amadu, 1983)

## **ELECTORAL COMMISSIONS AND THE MANAGEMENT OF THE DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS IN NIGERIA**

The freeness, fairness and credibility of an election is not only judged based on the events on the election day, it also relate to the totality of the electoral cycle which consist of important issues such as the provision of credible and updated voters' register, a functioning party system, nomination of candidates, conduct of a violent free party campaigns, adequate provision of voting materials, the actual conduct of the voting, speedy counting and declaration of results and post-elections activities including elections petitions and fair and speedy resolution of all litigations emerging from the conduct of the election. (Ntalaja, 2000) These important issues that make up the electoral cycle are expected to be overseeing by an independent electoral institution. This requirement place the electoral institution at a strategic position in a nation's democratization process, as it remains the principal body constitutionally charged with the responsibility of managing the electoral process. Hence, the success of any elections and electoral process is directly linked to the competency of the electoral institution. (Ikelegbe, 2004)

The history of democratization process in Nigeria has indeed shown the strong relationship that exists between electoral process and the managing institution history has shown that a non-competent, partisan, biased and resource starved institution cannot successfully midwife an important, highly delicate and complex issue like elections and electoral process. The nation's history abounds with instances where efforts at democratization have been bungled on the altar of badly managed electoral process. It is on record that the incompetency and partisanship that characterized the management of the 1964 general elections and the 1965 Western Region election by the then Federal Electoral Commission, contributed greatly to the

crisis that enveloped the republic, which later led to its collapse. (Amadu, 1983) Showing the lack of independence of FEC from the party in power, it is noted, that the administration of the election was in the hands of officials responsive to direction and pressure from the ruling party. Using compilation of official obstruction, brutal violence and total manipulation of the process of compilation of the national voters' register, the ruling coalition was able to manipulate the electoral process in accord with officials of NPC and therefore emerged victorious. (Diamond, 2002)

Through the 1979 elections conducted by the Federal Electoral Commission [FEDECO] under the watchful guidance of the departing military regime was somewhat credible if compared with the 1964 and 1965 elections. However, same cannot be said of the 1983 general elections. Of the entire crisis that characterized the conduct of the election by FEDECO, the most serious was the jumbled manner in which the voters' register was compiled. The exercise was described in retrospect as, "a film negative of what the actual elections would look like". (Tordoff, 1997) Most stakeholders in the electoral process demanded for an extension of the exercise while some called for the cancellation of the entire registration exercise and resignation of the commission chairman Justice Ovie-Whiskey. Perhaps recalling the fiasco that surrounded the 1964 electoral registration exercise, whose distortion later emerged as part of the grand strategy of the ruling coalition then, opposition leaders in the Second Republic alleged a deliberate sabotage of the voters' list by FEDECO as part of National Party of Nigeria's [NPN] strategy to rig the 1983 elections. (Helds, 1982)

## **Conclusion**

It is obvious that a major instrument for measuring the democratic status of any nation is regular and credible elections. What this paper has attempted to do is to explain the crisis of governance and democratic consolidation by tracing it to the fraudulent and undemocratic nature of elections in Nigeria. The conclusion is that until the country is able to put in place a robust, lawful and credible electoral machinery, it will continue to contend with the phenomenon of failed and unresponsive governance, which has continually affected the democratic process even in the current Fourth Republic.

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