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A Comparative Analysis of the 2007 and 2011 General Elections in Nigeria

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Abstract

Election has become one of the most important pillars of democracy. This is a necessary condition for any legitimate government. Free and fair conduct determines the readiness of a country to embrace and nurture democratic practice. However, Nigeria's electoral management has always been mismanaged since her return to democratic rule in May, 1999. As a matter of fact, the conduct of elections in Nigeria since 1999 has been marred with manipulation, fraud and violence. According to reports, the 2007 election was the worst in the series of badly conducted elections that the country has witnessed since 1999. On the contrary, the administration of the 2011 general elections was positively appraised by both the local and international observers. This makes it imperative to make a comparative study of the 2007 and 2011 elections. With the aid of comparison, the paper infers that the challenges of electoral fraud can be overcome if the electoral body enjoys relative independence in the management of the electoral process. The paper concludes that the 2011 general elections is far better in the manner of its administration compare to the 2007 general elections. This portrays that Nigeria is moving forward in its efforts at democratic consolidation.

Key words: Election, Election Administration, Democracy, Manipulation, Free and Fair

Introduction

Election appears to be one of the most important mechanism by which democratic government can be realized. It represents a universally accepted method of selecting political leaders in democratic states. Since election is the heartbeat of democracy, it can therefore be asserted that without elections, democracy cannot be institutionalized (Uche, 2003:45). Nigeria's electoral processes have always been marred with reported instances of irregularities, rigging and manipulations. The quality of election, which is one of the mechanisms for gauging the extent of democratic consolidation, has shown evidence of progressive decline since the return to democratic rule in May, 1999. As rightly observed by Mustapha (2007:3) between 1999 and 2007, Nigeria has held three elections and there has been a systemic persistent deterioration in the quality of the elections.

In the 1999 general elections there were some compliant of old style of 'competitive' rigging at different constituencies across the country. Most observers remarked that the 1999 elections were peaceful and that despite the perceived problem, the announced outcome was roughly consistent with the wishes of the Nigerian electorates, even if the margin of victory has been inflated. However, in 2003 the systemic deployment of organized thugery, violence and the brazen manipulation of party congresses and the actual elections in few states, particularly in the Niger Delta and South East geo-political zones were obvious. In 2007, violence and brazen manipulation occurred across most states of the federation. In essence, Nigerians decisively moved from "competitive rigging" to "coercive rigging", from elections, no matter how flawed to brazen 'selection' especially in respect to the 2007 general elections (Mustapha, 2007).

However, the 2011 general election, the fourth in the series of national elections after Nigeria's return to electoral democracy in 1999 marked a watershed in the history of the conduct of elections in the country. The election was applauded by both local and international observers as being credible and transparent. Unlike the previous elections that were characterized by high level of malpractices the 2011 general elections, to some extent, showcased the wishes of the electorates (Alabi and Sakariyau, 2013:2). The same electoral body, the Independent

National Electoral Commission (INEC), which organized the 2007 general elections described as the 'worst' in Nigerian history also conducted the laudable 2011 general elections. This was attached to the change in the leadership of the commission by some scholars (Obi, 2007; Mustapha, 2007 and Moveh, 2009). The change in leadership baton saw Atahiru Jega, a Professor of Political Science, replacing Maurice Iwu, pharmacist as chairman of the electoral body prior to the conduct of the 2011 general elections. The independence of INEC in the conduct of the 2011 elections which has been praised and particularly the observed neutrality of the INEC leadership is largely a function of the individual difference in temperament.

Interestingly, the administration of the 2011 general elections built more confidence in the mind of average Nigerian that electioneering exercise in the country can be conducted in a free and fair context. The judgments of election tribunals upholding most of the election results testified to the success of the electoral body in the 2011 elections. As argued earlier, unlike the 2007 general election were incidents of hijacking of ballot boxes were rampant, such trend was curtailed in the 2011 elections. Although there were some challenges experienced in the conduct of the 2011 general election as perfection is not obtainable anywhere in the world, the administration of the 2011 elections was a turning point in the history of Nigerian electioneering process. In order to do justification to this study, the article was divided into five sections. The first section gives background information of the subject of discourse while the second segment dwell on conceptual clarification. The third section contains the comparative assessment of the work of the management of the 2007 and 2011 general elections which is enriched with relevant instances. The fourth section dwells on the prospect of democratic consolidation in Nigeria while the last part gives the concluding remark of the article.

Conceptualising Electoral Administration

Election administration is a key factor in determining democratic practice in any country as its proper conduct enhances free and fair election process. Election administration involves the facilitation of voting and the management of electoral process at all levels from the

local to the national. This includes the organization of election agencies, the behaviour and characteristics of state and local election officials, the process of conducting election and the policies guiding the conduct of the elections. Election administration at the local level includes running the polls on the election day, as well as all pre and post-election activities, such as maintaining voters registration lists, drawing precincts, selecting polling sites, procuring equipment, recruiting and training poll workers, canvassing the vote, and evaluating and implementing improvements to the process itself. On the state level, election administration ranges from the maintenance of the state-wide voter registration file and the implementation of federal and state laws and policies concerning election, to the preparation and printing of the voter information guide or ballot pamphlet for state-wide offices and initiatives (Election Administration Center, 2011).

Election administration has rightly noted by Jinadu (1997, cited in Moveh, 2009) entails the organization and conduct of elections to elective (political) public office by an electoral body. This perception of election administration captures both structures and processes. By structure, it deals with the bureaucratic set up and the electoral body that ensures conduct of election. The structure which is mandated to conduct election in Nigeria is the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). However, it should be noted that apart from this specific bureaucracy whose primary function is the administration of elections there are agencies or institutions like the civil society, police and security agencies whose cooperation through the provision of logistic support is vital to the operation of the electoral body (Moveh, 2001). By process on the other hand, it indicates rules, procedures and activities relating to among others: the establishment of electoral bodies, the appointment of their members, selection and training of electoral officials, constituency delimitation, voter education, registration of political parties, registration of voters, the nomination of candidates, balloting, counting of the ballots, declaration of results, and in some cases supervision of party nomination and congresses (Jinadu, 1997 cited in Moveh, 2009).

In another dimension, electoral administration is viewed as the management and organization of all stages of the electoral process: the pre-election, election and post-election stages by an electoral body

(Ajayi, 2007). As Olatunde (2007) has rightly observed, the planning and organizing of election in order to achieve political stability within a state is the major attribute of electoral administration. This according to him, entails the revision of voters' registration list, mapping out of pooling booths and centres, provision of election materials, conveying of election materials to site, as well as training and development of electoral officers to sensitize them of the election rules and regulations and provision of security to safeguard election materials and personnel involved in the conduct of the election.

Election administration also involves collation, record keeping, verification and dissemination of election results to the political parties, relevant agencies and security organizations who participated in the national or state election and the general public who casted their votes during the election. From the above concept, one can see that election administration is a complex issue that involves careful logistic planning from the time the election timetable was released and the time the processis completed. In essence, electoral administration is an inter-related set of actions which national organization in charge of the conduct and process of election has to put in place to ensure success of election process and achieve national political stability (Olatunde, 2007). In a similar vein, electoral administration is also viewed from an aspect of public administration (management) work that requires proper planning, articulation, control and co-ordination. Electoral administration will be free and fair, when management principles or elements are followed to a reasonable extent. No nation has achieved one hundred per cent in election administration, but there is the need to ensure free and fair election under democratic setting.

The 2007 and 2011 General Elections: A Comparison

The 2007 state and federal elections have fallen short of basic international and regional standard for democratic elections. They were marred by poor organization, lack of essential transparency, widespread procedural irregularities, significant evidence of fraud, particularly during result collation process, voter's disenfranchisement at different stages of the process, lack of equal conditions for contestants

and numerous incidents of violence. As a result, the elections have not lived up to the hopes and expectations of the Nigerian people and the process cannot be considered to have been credible (EUEOM, 2007; Quoted in Adebayo and Omotola, 2007: 207).

The above comment of the European Union Election Observation Mission (EUEOM) on the conduct of 2007 general elections in Nigeria says it all as it relates to the poor conduct of the electoral process. During the 2007 general election political sponsorship, recruitment and use of thugs often armed with traditional weapons or sophisticated firearms remained a permanent feature across states of the federation. This deployment of political thugs was prominent in states of Borno, Abia, Taraba, Kano, Kaduna, Katsina, Oyo, Osun, Lagos, Edo among others. Incidents of hijacking of ballot boxes were witnessed in many of the aforementioned states. The 2007 general elections like Nigeria's past elections were characterized and marred by various levels and dimensions of irregularities. Domestic and international election observers condemned the organization and conduct of the elections and concluded that the elections failed to meet the minimum international standard for credible elections. The election process was marked by serious shortcomings and delays in electoral preparation. In particular, voter's registration has been the source of difficulties and controversy. Candidates' nominations, the monitoring of campaign finances and media coverage of elections were also not implemented in an orderly manner. On elections day, the main problem included late opening of most polling stations, lack of secrecy of the vote and in certain areas such as Anambra central senatorial district and Yenegua in Bayelsa state, election did not take place at all.

As rightly observed by Alemika and Omotosho (2008), prior to the conduct of the 2007 federal elections, there was a desperate attempt by the presidency and the ruling People's Democratic Party to use the law and law enforcement agencies, in very perverse ways, to exclude those they regarded as strong opponents from the electoral process. There were

cases of hurriedly assembled panels to investigate individuals and submit findings within very short period. The findings, often biased or predetermined to suit the incumbent government, were used to disqualify opponents. Affected individuals approached the court for enforcement of their rights. Most of the aggrieved parties obtained favourable judgment thereby underscoring the illegality of the investigation and efforts to undermine political competition and choices.

The pre-election period was also characterized by violence including assassination of prominent politicians. There was overwhelming lack of preparation for the election by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The registration of voters was characterized by widespread irregularities, shortages of materials and constant malfunctioning of equipment (Adisa, 2010:18). Civil education by the relevant government agencies was lacking. These lapses led to widespread concern by the citizens. Civil society Organizations (CSOs), in particular highlighted the lapses, their impact on the conduct of free and fair elections, and proposed remedies. However, the leadership of the electoral commission frequently rebuffed the suggestions of the CSOs (Alemika and Omotosho, 2008).

During the election, the crudity of election rigging was breathtaking (Adisa, 2010:18). In many states across the country, particularly in the South-South, South-East and South West no elections actually took place. In Anambra State, for instance, in most polling stations visited by observers simply did not open at all, as there were no official and no voting materials. Observers from the Catholic Church Justice, Development and Peace Commission (JDPC) reported that in Anambra Central Senatorial Districts no votes were cast at all. In Awka town, the state capital, Human Right Watch reported that several polling stations were open at about noon, but due to widespread controversy surrounding the lack of voters' register and result sheets at some polling stations many voters refused to participate and only a handful of ballots were casted. (Adam, 2010: 16).

The elections in most other states followed a similar sinister pattern. In Edo, Ogun, Ondo, Ekiti and Oyo states partial voting

was allowed in a few areas, while theft of ballot boxes and organized violence dominated events. Predictably, working according to its predetermined agenda, INEC awarded victories to the PDP candidates in all these states, notwithstanding, the verdict of the populations expressed through the ballots (DSM, 2007). The gubernatorial and assembly elections in Oyo state were characterized by snatching and burning of ballot boxes, intimidation of voters, harassment of journalists and indiscriminate shootings. Notorious areas in which fraud were rampant includes Oloni, Oke-Are, New Garage, Odo-ona, Elewa, Mokola all in the Ibadan City. In the Lagos and Egbeta Local government Areas, INEC officials replaced the names of residents with those of non-residents, while under-aged were engaged in voting in Akinyele Local government Area of Oyo state (Adeagbo and Olasebikan, 2007).

In Ondo state, the Deputy Governor was allegedly sighted snatching ballot boxes in Akure, the state capital under the gaze of a plethora of security agents, including soldiers. In Osun state, a PDP member of the House of Representatives was caught by vigilant residents in his bid to escape with ballot boxes that had been stuffed with thumb-printed ballot papers. There was a drama at INEC office in Akure after the completion of voting for gubernatorial candidates, while the state Resident Electoral Commissioner informed the public that the election result was being collated, the federal INEC commissioner for information, had declared Agagu of the PDP as the winner.

In Enugu state, the PDP reportedly hired two floors of a popular hotel near the Enugu state Broadcasting Service in Uwani to thumbprint thousands of ballot papers. Meanwhile, there was no INEC official at polling stations where security agents shot at random to intimidate voters and deter them from exercising their right. In Bayelsa state, as in most states in the country, INEC officials and material were absent from several polling stations and in some of the few places at which INEC officials made an appearance they arrived without election result sheets (Obi, 2007:21). In Kogi state, political thugs roamed the towns of Idah,

Ankpa, Kabba, Ibeji, Ennu, Koton-Karte, Ejuku, Olamaboro, Magono and Lokoja, the state capital, with dangerous weapons, terrorizing voters and forcing them to flee to safety (Uno, 2007:84).

In Edo State, it was glaring that some forces were against the candidature of Oshiomole, the gubernatorial candidate of the Action Congress (AC). Envisaging their political death in the event of the emergence of Oshiomole as the state governor, the PDP godfathers resorted to the use of thugs to manipulate the electoral process. The declaration by INEC of Osumbor of the PDP as winner of the gubernatorial election threw the state into uncontrollable pandemonium. In Kwara state, as in other states, elections were not held in many areas and, where they were held, ballot boxes containing genuine votes were forcibly replaced with those already stuffed with thumb-printed ballot papers in favour of the PDP. In Ekiti state, a Serving High Court Judge was allegedly caught in Osi in Ekiti Local Government Area stuffing ballot boxes with thumb printed papers. The situation was in no way different across Niger and Benue States where there were no voting at all and what played itself out was a mockery of the electoral process.

Given the level of political apathy and the threat by visibly armed security men stationed everywhere in Nigeria, there was no way there could have been the level of voters' turnout reflected in the results of the general elections. The result of the presidential election announced by INEC even stunned the late President Yar'Adua, who acknowledged in his inauguration speech that the electoral process had been faulty. Indeed, the result of the elections simply shows the crude manipulation by INEC in favour of the ruling PDP (Uno, 2007:85). Admittedly, majority of the verdicts of the election petition tribunals across the country vindicated the views of the election observers and millions of Nigerians. Many hitherto adjudged electoral 'victories' have been over turned. In some cases, the tribunals have declared as winners candidates who were defeated, while in others fresh elections had been ordered (Ikechukwu, 2008).

In comparative term, the 2011 general elections marked a watershed in the history of the conduct of elections in the country being the first that was appraised by both local and international observers as being credible and transparent. Unlike the 2007 election that was characterized with high level of malpractices and rigging (Alabi and Sakariyau, 2013:2), the conduct of the 2011 election in Nigeria could be traced to the voter's registration exercise which took place from January 15 to February 7, 2011 that witnessed high level of enthusiasm with which Nigerians turned out massively to be registered. At the end of the registration exercise, 62 million eligible voters were registered. (Smith, 2011:7). Interestingly, the voter's registration exercise being the first major assignment under the new head of the commission, Atahiru Lega, was given applause due to the manner and methods designed to carry out the exercise. With the release of election time tables the politicians had the floor to embark on rigorous campaign.

However, due to logistic constraint, the election time table was revised and rescheduled. The postponement of the election led to the conduct of National Assembly election on 9th of April and that of Presidential election was stated for April 16 and finally the gubernatorial and House of Assembly elections were held on April 26th, 2011. Notwithstanding the change in the timing, the election went on peacefully and witnessed massive turn up from the electorates. As Abati (2011), rightly observed, the same electoral commission that organized the 2007 general elections that was described as the worst in Nigeria's electoral history also organized the 2011 elections. The international community has been warm in its praise, while election observers have been similarly generous. With the conduct of the 2011 general elections Nigerians may no longer be reminded of how their Ghanaian neighbours are better managers of electoral processes. In his pre-election speech titled 'we cannot afford to fail', the chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Atahiru Lega emphasized the need to get the 2011 election right. Lega's action prompted Abati (2011) to lament that the independence of INEC in the conduct of 2011 general elections, which has been praised and particularly the observed neutrality of the body leadership is largely a function of the individual difference in temperament.

One factor that accounted for the glaring difference between the 2007 and 2011 is the critical question of leadership. In 2007, former President Olusegun Obasanjo publicly and unabashedly declared that it was going to be a do or die affair. However, unlike the electoral body that exhibited gross ineptitude and downright insincerity in the conduct of the 2007 general election, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) under Lega maintained some level of neutrality and impartiality during the conduct of the 2011 general elections. Although President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan displayed political will that ensured free and fair contest. This argument can be juxtaposed with the outcome of the elections in some states whereby power of incumbency did not count (Alabi and Sakariyau, 2013: 5). Not only that, the manner in which election materials were distributed to various polling units was characterized with transparency and fairness. Most election materials arrived on time and electorates were accredited before normal voting commenced. On the part of election observers, they were duly accredited and were also allowed to watch the distribution of election materials, conduct of the voting, sorting and counting of ballots and announcement of results.

The entire process of the 2011 general election was widely adjudged as transparent to a considerable extent. The open secret system of balloting blocked the loopholes usually exploited by unscrupulous politicians to perpetrate electoral fraud at polling stations. The novel of idea of bringing the National Youth Service Corps members to serve as ad-hoc electoral officials greatly diminished the chances of multiple thumb printing of ballot papers. The involvement of University lecturers as Returning Officers enhanced the integrity of the elections. Although a number of shortcomings were identified, election monitors both local and international attested to the credibility of the election (Tribune, May 13, 2011). The success of the 2011 general election was also attributed to what European Union Election Observation Mission (EUEOM) referred to as stakeholders' supportive role. This according to the mission laid an overall democratic foundation for further democratic development in accordance with international principles and with international instruments ratified by the Federal Republic of Nigeria. By stakeholders' supportive role, the electoral observer (EUEOM) maintains that the conduct of free and fair election is not necessarily the monopoly of the

government to protect its own interests (Tribune, May 13, 2011). The implication of this as put by the City of Rights Congress (CROC) is the displacement of a nation that 40 thousand people, it also posed serious threat to the country's economic and political drive. Such attitude indicates the level of political culture of Nigerian politicians: the electorate and those saddled with the management of the electoral process. Unfortunately, the 2011 elections reinforced Nigerian's ethnicity and religion because an important intervening factor in the country's electoral process. The trend of the voting and the election results have been in high level of ethnic-religious consideration in the electoral behaviour and decision of Nigerian electorates, used illegal and unfair and bias voting and etc. (Ibid).

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expected to surface cum 2015 general elections. The security agencies should be neutral to avoid being used as tools of intimidation. Though the security agencies may claim some credit for success of election 2011, they failed in containing the spread of the post-presidential election violence in the north.

Not only that, the registration exercise should not be an election-time activity; there is need for the voters' register to be updated routinely and carefully scrutinized. Too many Nigerians were excluded from the voting process; either because they are abroad or on official duty or physically challenged. Special arrangements should be made for the physically challenged. As suggested by Abati (2011) arrangement can be made for absentee balloting.

The level of political culture is still worrisome and disturbing and which questions democratic sustainability in the country. Voters' education is an area that government needs to strengthen. Majority of the electorates still subject themselves to influence of money, favouritism and sectionalism. The National Orientation Agency (NOA) should take voters' education as a responsibility that must be discharged to every nook and cranny of the country. It is high time Nigerians embraced politics of ideology and creativity rather than that of money politics and buying and selling of votes.

Also, it will serve Nigeria's democracy better if a training institute is established for prospective politicians. Such learning centre should have a curriculum designed for the purpose of leadership skills. With the setting up of institute of this nature politicians can be trained and prepared for political positions. This gesture would minimize the problem thuggery and hooliganism in Nigerian politics and pave way for responsible leaders to emerge at all tiers of government.

In the final analysis, the judicial system is performing and supportive, however it needs to be more independent. Election tribunals have played significant roles in ensuring that stolen mandates were returned to the legitimate owners. But in some cases, one can hardly differentiate politics from law. Meanwhile politicization of judicial system will be antithetical to democratic virtues. The judiciary should desist from being a tool of any political class because Nigerians deserve justice, peace and free and fair elections.

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