

**EFFECTS OF DIRECT PRIMARY ELECTION IN NIGERIA:
A REFLECTION OF 2019 ELECTION**

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Abstract

Nigeria's political history reveals a longstanding trend of electoral fraud through the indirect primary elections. This necessitates the adoption of direct primary elections, - a mini-election where a registered party members only vote for the one who will "serve" as the flag-bearer of their party. This study relies on secondary data to examine the effects of direct primary election on 2019 general election. The study established that the 2019 direct primary election was marred by crises arising from the misgivings from undemocratic conduct of primary elections that may spell political doom to the party if not effectively regulated. Weak structure and lack of internal democracy makes the process more of a political gimmick than reality as national leadership of the APC imposes their candidates on their members. The election was also characterized by fraud, corruption and violence. Consequently this study suggest that party leadership should ensure fairness and transparency in the conduct of primaries so that results can reflect the choice of a majority of the party members vis-à-vis maintain the integrity of the party.

Keywords: Primary elections, direct primary elections, political parties

Introduction

A primary election is a mini-election where a political party elects its preferred candidate to run for public office under its platform. During the primaries, parties go through an elimination process where they trim down a pool of nominees to just one person who will represent them at the general polls. Primary election could be direct or indirect. In September, the first election took place in Lagos and Calabar following the introduction of the Sir Hugh Clifford Constitution in 1922. The Nigerian National Democratic Party led by Herbert Macaulay won the three seats for the Lagos Legislative Council while the Calabar Improvement League, won the only seat for Calabar. Although voting was by direct election, it (the election) was based on limited franchise. Many Nigerians were thus disenfranchised. 1946: An indirect system of election which filled seats in Regional and Central Legislatures, following the introduction of Sir Arthur Richards (Lord Milverton) Constitution a year earlier.

An indirect election is an election in which voters do not choose between candidates for an office, but elect people who then choose. It is one of the oldest forms of elections, and is still used today for many presidents, cabinets, upper houses, and supranational legislatures. Presidents and prime ministers can be indirectly elected by parliaments or by a special body convened solely for that purpose. The election of the executive government in most parliamentary systems is indirect: elect the parliamentarians, who then elect the government including most prominently the prime minister from among them. Upper houses, especially of federal republics, can be indirectly elected by state legislatures or state governments. Similarly, supranational legislatures can be indirectly elected by constituent countries' legislatures or executive governments.

Preceding studies established that power of incumbency, influence, money, political thugs, money politics, lack of political awareness, selfishness, greediness, lack of exposure, over-ambition, nepotism, and politics of regionalism among other. In order to minimize the problems and uphold free fair and credible election in Nigeria the paper suggested for the proper adoption of direct primary election. This is in line with the declaration of APC National Chairman in 2018, and in preparation of 2019 general election. According to (Oladesu, 2018; Ojeifo, 2018) the APC national chairman declared the implementation of direct primary elections in the APC across the 36 of the federation this is to overcome the problem of godson and godfather domination in the APC political movements. He believes this method of the direct primary election would help in electing the right aspirant for 2019 general elections. This established a reliable gap to conduct a study on the effect of direct primary election on 2019 general elections.

Conceptual Discourse

Election Process

Election is the process of choosing leaders in a democratic process where a legitimate change of government is constitutionally allowed. Election in Nigeria has been taking place since 1922 and since that period, election occurred continuously until 1960 when the political independence was attained from Britain. After political independence, election took place in 1964 but the democratic regime was short-lived because of gory military coup. In 1979, Nigeria dropped the parliamentary system of government and switched to presidential system. The aborted third Republic in 1991 could not achieve a smooth transition until in 1999 when the Fourth Republic emerged and remains the longest democratic transition in the history of the country (Johari 2008 & Sule, 2018).

Nigeria is presently in the fourth Republic; and there are over 60 political parties. These notwithstanding, the nature and conception of political parties in Nigeria make them an inescapable fact of the Nigerian political life. The rationale for the above assertion is based on the fact that, it is only through political parties that politics and the quest to control and exercise governmental powers find expression. Nigeria as of today has no provisions for independent candidacy. Hence, the only acceptable way to play politics is to do so via a political party platform.

Election takes place in Nigeria at different levels. In the Fourth Republic, from 1999 to the 2019 General Elections, there are seven electoral offices constitutionally including the Presidential, Senatorial, Federal House of Representatives, Gubernatorial, State House of Assembly, Chairmanship and Councillorship (Nigerian 1999 Constitution as amended). One of the most interesting episodes in Nigerian politics is the Presidential Election. This is because of the voting pattern and political behaviour of the Nigerian voters towards electing their leaders. This makes the battle for the Presidential seat intense, chaotic and threatening, sometimes to the extent of national disintegration. The culture of ethnic, religious and regional voting inherited from the nationalists during the colonial period spillover to the present era and it seems to be continuous (Sule, 2017).

Essentially, Nigeria elections rely on two main authorized documents which are the 1999 Constitution as Amended and the Electoral Act 2010. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is the

agency that is saddled with the responsibility of the conduct of elections and other related matters such as registration and de-registration of political parties, regulating the conducts and activities of contestants and political parties and designing regulations for the electorates towards the conduct of the election proper. The INEC has been perceived as one of the challenges of electoral conduct in Nigeria due to alleged corruption, partiality, irregularities, shoddy preparations and lack of expertise and professionalism among others (The Centre for Public Policy Alternatives, 2015). Election in Nigeria usually has the political culture and voting pattern of ethnicity, religion and regionalism which is part of the issues that are bedeviling the successful choice of good leaders in the country (Abdullahi, 2015). Closely related to the above is the politics of winning at all cost where elections in Nigeria are marred with rigging, violence, manipulation of results and intimidation of opposition and their supporters using the apparatus of security personnel and political thugs (Auwal, 2015). Election in Nigeria took the dimension of money politics where

Analysts affirmed that the 2019 general election and particularly the presidential is one of the most enthusiastically and strictly contested in the history of Nigerian Presidential Elections since the colonial and post-independence period. The election was heralded with tensions, accusations and counter-accusations, passionate campaign, trade of blames by the ruling and major opposition parties and other related issues(Auwal, 2015).

Primary election

A primary election is a mini form of election during which the chosen political party chooses its candidate, which in the future will contest for public office under its political platform. According to Adewoya (2018) a primary election is a mini-election where a political party elects its preferred candidate to run for public office under its platform. During the primaries, parties go through an elimination process where they trim down a pool of nominees to just one person who will represent them at the general polls.

It is believed that political party and candidate selection as termed primary elections enjoy unrivalled eminence in political discourse and analysis on democracy, democratization and to a significant extent political development via democratic consolidation. Political parties feature as most critical aspect of the electoral process. Party politics, nevertheless, has suffered a chequered history in Nigeria. Right from the adoption of the Clifford Constitution of 1922, the Nigerian political space has been littered with the emergence of political parties in each of the epochs that have come up in the close to one hundred years of party politics in the country. Political parties, being central to democratic governance have come to occupy an important position in Nigeria's political process. With the establishment by Sir Herbert Macaulay of the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) several political associations have explored the political/electoral space provided by democratic governance to express their freedom of association to want to capture, organize and indeed exercise the political and governmental powers that control the Nigerian state.

For nearly two decades, primary elections have become an integral part of Nigeria's electoral system as parties get together separately to elect a flag bearer to contest for elective positions on their platforms. It is during the primary elections that parties go through an elimination process where they cut down on a number of aspirants to just one in each elective position to represent them at the general polls where all eligible Nigerians cast their votes. In the Electoral Act of 2010 (as amended), Section 87 stipulates that the procedure for the nomination of candidates by political parties for various elective positions could be by a direct or indirect process. It's important to state clearly what either method represents for internal democracy in the country.

Jega (2013) explain that one major avenue for testing the true adherence to democratic principles is via the primary elections. Primary elections provide the platform for the political parties to select credible candidates to contest elections, while applying the cherished attribute of democracy which is to provide

opportunity to the populace to make informed and free choices of those to rule them. Primary elections in a party system are therefore a major test of the entrenchment of true democracy in any society. Where the core values of democracy that includes fairness, competition, moderation and the rules of the game, i.e. the ante-indeterminacy of the electoral process (Jinadu, 2016), are discountenanced and have little or no relevance, it gives way to the rule of force and struggle for power at all cost and by all means whether fair or foul. It naturally follows that where party primaries are compromised, the options for citizens to determine who rules them is foreclosed. This development naturally evoke responses from the informed public, party members, institutions and agencies that are involved in the electoral process and the international community with negative consequences for the nature of the conduct of general elections and the electoral processes. In Nigeria, the immediate noticeable reactions are the defection of losers of party primaries to other political parties, violent conflicts and protests and political assassinations.

Indirect Primary election

In an indirect primary election, party members elect delegates who in turn elect the party's candidates on their behalf. Delegates are a democratically elected group of voters elected at party congresses. A congress is a formal meeting or convention between members of a political party. During the congress, registered members of a political party elect these delegates that will represent them at local, state and national congresses. In a direct primary election, registered members of the party just vote for who they want to be the flag-bearer of their party. Unlike with the indirect primaries, no delegates are involved, party members choose their representatives through polls like they would in a general election.

In Nigeria since the present democratic dispensation, more precisely from 2003 till date; primary elections were dominated by political party leadership and where a party is the ruling party in the state or at the national level, its activities particularly with recourse to candidate selection was dominated by the personality of the political leader been the president or governor as the case may be. These scenarios are detrimental to transparency and internal democracy and have remained problematic to political development in Nigeria. It is therefore against the above backdrop that the Nigerian political parties are marred by incidences of similar primaries in the quest by some political aspirants to realize their ambitions without recourse to the consensus seemingly imposed by the leadership. Evidences of this are more common in the political party that have perceived itself as the ruling party and which the members believe that any candidate presented under the platform of the party has already won the election, no matter what it takes.

For this reason, a proper perspective of the roles, issues and challenges of direct primary elections in Nigeria must be established vis-à-vis its implication to the political development of the Nigerian state. Haven witnessed the all-important polls of 2019; it is obvious that these issues have played themselves out at various levels especially at the presidential election level. Consequently, an effect of direct primary election in Nigeria is very crucial. This paper analyzes conceptual and theoretical issues of elections, its centrality in democratic governance, and institutional framework for political parties' direct primaries. It further explores the pro and cons of direct primary elections among political parties in Nigeria and its implication to political development and finally in drawing its conclusion also points to the way forward. Nigeria's 2010 Electoral Act mandates that all political parties hold primaries. In the build-up to the 2015 elections, Muhammadu Buhari won the All Progressive Congress (APC) presidential primaries, emerging the victor over Atiku Abubakar, Rochas Okorocha and Musa Kwankwaso (Vanguard, 2018).

The indirect method empowers a special group of voters called 'delegates' to make the choice for everybody else. Delegates are usually elected through ward congresses where registered party members elect people that will represent them at local, state and national congresses. Some parties, most notably the PDP, adopt a method where any registered party member that is also an elected or appointed public official is automatically a delegate at local, state and national congresses. They are called 'statutory delegates'. The indirect method is commonly criticised for being too easily manipulated by party leaders,

aspirants, as well as delegates who have frequently been accused of selling their votes to the highest bidder at the detriment of the wishes of the people (Jinadu 2015).

It is certain that delegate primaries are an open market that shortchanges the majority to reward the powerful few that have mobilized enough cash to control the process. If democracy is to be rightly interpreted in its original form, there is no way this will suffice as the best democratic option open for members of a party to exercise their natural rights of selecting who to put forward in elections. Again, this mode of party primaries remains one of the central canons of the dysfunctional democracy Nigeria has been saddled with since independence. This necessitates the clamor for direct primary election (Toromade, 2018). Notably, PDP, adopt an indirect method of electing their representatives; the APC opted for a mix of direct and indirect elections. 18 APC state chapters (including the FCT) have opted to elect governorship and legislative candidates through a direct method, while the other 19 elected candidates through an indirect method (Vanguard 2018).

Direct Primary election

Elections today in developed nations especially U.S are relatively candidate-centered contests. This is true not only compared to the party-centered" elections in Western Europe and many other countries, but also compared to U.S. elections in the past. When and why did this era of more personalistic voting emerge? Presently, the conventional wisdom is that U.S. elections became much more candidate-centered around the 1960s. Aldrich and Niemi (1990) refer to the post-1960s era as the the sixth party system." Aldrich (1995, p. 253) summarizes the literature as follows:

Together these studies show that there was an important shift in elections to all national offices in or about 1960, demonstrating that voters respond to candidates far more than previously. Voting became candidate centered, and so parties as mechanisms for understanding candidates, campaigns, and election became less relevant.

The transformation from partisan to personal electoral politics is commonly attributed to changes in the political atmosphere that improved the importance of individual politicians' attributes and undermined traditional party organizations; by implication changes in campaign advertising technologies such as social media the rise of television, the replacement of patronage with civil service employment, and an increase in the personal resources available to elected officials for constituency service. These factors led voters to see parties as increasingly irrelevant and party attachments destabilized. Campbell (2007, p. 68) describes the process as follows:

Since the 1960s the role of the political parties in American politics has fundamentally changed. A series of technological, institutional, legal, and cultural shifts diminished their once central function as the organizers and inclusive mobilizers of American elections. They ceded control over nominations and were pushed aside by new candidate-centered campaigns. Technological advances allowed candidates to speak directly to the people, and the parties lost their monopoly

In direct primary election, registered party members only vote for the one who will "serve" as the flag-bearer of their party., Key (1964, p. 342) acknowledged that the adoption of the direct primary opened the road for disruptive forces that gradually fractionalized the party organization. In addition, the primary system... facilitated the construction of factions and cliques attached to ambitions of individual leaders. Some more recent scholars make similar arguments. For example, Herrnson (1988, p. 26) asserted that: "The introduction of the direct primary encouraged candidates to develop their own campaign organizations, or pseudo-parties, for contesting primary elections." Jacobson (2004, p.15-16) emphasizes the impact this has had on party organizations:

A fundamental factor [in the decline of parties] is clearly institutional: the rise and spread of primary elections as the method for choosing party nominees for the general election... Primary elections have

largely deprived parties of their most important source of influence over elected officials. Parties no longer control access to the ballot and, therefore, to political office. They cannot determine who runs under their label and so cannot control what the label represents... parties typically have few sanctions and little influence [on nominations]."

The difference between indirect and direct primary election is that during the direct primaries, there are no delegates involved. The members of the party choose the representatives through polls just like in any other general election. In a direct primary election, registered members of the party just vote for who they want to be the flag-bearer of their party. (Kupoluyi, 2019). The APC in Osun State was the piloted the direct primaries in choosing their preferred candidate, where every card-carrying member of the party participated in the process of nominating the flag bearer for the APC (Vanguard, 2018).

Even though the 2010 Electoral Act allows for either of the two processes, Nigeria's major political parties opt for indirect primaries. This has been criticized for being easier to manipulate by party leaders and delegates. And even though the vote does not bind delegates to support a particular candidate, they are sometimes expected to align with constituency or party. However, delegates have been known to disregard the wishes of the delegation they are supposed to represent and vote as they wish.

Granted that there are oppositions to this mode of election but what is needed was that the leadership of the APC stood its ground and in a matter of little time, it became a positive trend that grew and enrich our democracy. Leading the opposition to the adoption of direct primaries are the governors who relish the employment of state treasuries and apparatchiks of government to take absolute control of parties and dictate what happens therein. The governors have come to believe that absolute control of parties and deciding the fates of others is an integral part of their powers and as such, they play others like pawns in an expansive chessboard that assures them tight control of the process. The selection of delegates as their desires approve has become an unusual tool in their hands such that they see direct primary as an audacious attempt to latch the control of parties off their hands. They will do everything to retain this skewed status quo to ensure they do not liberalize control of political parties which direct primaries are bound to ensure. It is therefore not surprising that they have stood as a barricade against direct primaries and are doing everything to dash its adoption. If, however parties belong to the people, every effort must be made to frustrate their scheme to nullify the adoption of direct primary in selecting candidates for elective positions (Vanguard, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the Rational Choice Theory (RCT) to explore the effects of 2019 direct primary election. The Rational Choice Theory of Election is a political economy approach towards understanding the nature and pattern of voters' choice during election primaries in a particular democratic setting. Downs (1957) was the proponent of RCT in his discourse of "An Economic Theory of Democracy". His work was corroborated by Arrow (1986). The Rational Choice Theory of Election identifies that political behaviour and voting pattern of the electorates is a rational choice based on some indicators such as economic benefit, resources allocation, distribution of goods and services, allocation of juicy political offices and favour (Downs, 1957; Arrow, 1986). This view has been consolidated by Farber (2009). Rational Choice Theory of Election is either evaluative or non-evaluative according to Downs (1957) and Arrow (1986).

The theory is relevant to this study since voting is acknowledged as a rational choice based on performances and clientele considerations. The results of the past political parties primary elections in Nigeria and that of the recently concluded 2019 direct primary elections from both All Progressive Congress (APC) and Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) is a good example of how the voters give much emphasis on transparency, trustworthiness, hard work than performances.

Methodology

This study used secondary data to explore the effects of 2019 general election in Nigeria. The paper used journal articles, text books, newspapers, magazine among others to review key variables, election process primary election and its typologies.

Direct primary election and the 2019 general election

The direct primary adopted mainly by the APC as the main type of elections during presidential and party's candidates' elections. The system offer an opportunity for participating in the process of determining who their standard flag bearer would be. Also, direct primaries can essentially explicate the archetypical democratic mode. Direct primaries enable the citizens choose their political "destiny". Abraham Lincoln's definition of democracy sounds like "the government of the people, by the people and for the people". It means that whatever system our country has and whoever we vote for, the most important is people's welfare. And the direct primary election gives the opportunity for citizens to have clear election system.

One of the thoughtful decisions the leadership of the All Progressives Congress is the adoption of direct primary as a means of selecting candidates that will fly the party's flag in all elective positions. The choice is as revolutionary and timely. It stood to have enhanced the stock of the APC in the concluded 2019 election. The APC direct primary among political parties has imbued greater participation and assurance among members of the party and placed them over other parties. It gives confidence to choices made because it benefits from the free choice of all members of the party in contrast to indirect primary or the consensus option where a few leaders of a party decides who is fielded as candidates for such parties in elections thereby limiting the capacity of members to choose and put up their best candidates for elections (Babayo, 2019).

Essentially, 2019 direct primaries toppled an old order that has benefited a select few against the silent majority that had lost their rights to choose and consequently enhances participatory ambience. By implication, 2019 direct primary rends the decision on who flies a party's flag in an election from the hands of few ubiquitous caucus members and hand such power to the rank and file of the party. There is nothing to argue about the fact that a more wholesome participation stands to throw up better and more popular options than a selection made by a few or through the convoluted process of delegate elections.

Albeit, delegate primaries was criticized because few delegates that often emerge through heavily compromised selection processes through fraught and manipulation and other corruptive influences. In other words delegate primaries often reward the highest bidder and are therefore not the best leadership selection modal in a democracy. The 2019 direct primary was criticized for high financial involvement. A lot more planning and organization is required, and direct primary was vulnerable to manipulation. For example, a candidate was accused of purchasing party membership cards just to partake in the primaries. Worse still, members of other parties deliberately join a particular party in order to vote for a weaker candidate at the primaries and maximize the chances of their own party winning the general election. These issues were not restricted to Nigeria alone but countries with similar political systems like India and the United States. Citizens do not pay as much attention to primaries even though the method of selection can determine the choices available on the ballot paper at the general elections.

Direct primaries offer the chances for the participation of members in the process of electing the candidates and as such allow the candidates to enjoy the confidence of a greater number of electorates of which the members of a party that elect candidates are part of. In the light of above, party leadership should ensure fairness and transparency in the conduct of primaries so that results can reflect the choice of a majority of the party members. While one recognizes the huge cost implications as well as the unwieldy process involved in direct primaries, there is no arguing that the acceptability of the outcome as well as the confidence such produces far rewards the costs of the process. Finally, the 2019 direct primaries scale down the post-electoral rancor and disputes. These caused anti-party in Imo and Ogun states which consequently led to the sanction of the then governors of the two states

Conclusion

This paper examines the effects of 2019 direct primary election in Nigeria. The study established that the 2019 direct primary election was marred by crises arising from the misgivings from undemocratic conduct of primary elections that may spell political doom to the party if not effectively regulated. Weak structure and lack of internal democracy makes the process more of a political gimmick than reality as national leadership of the APC imposes their candidates on their members. The election was also characterized by fraud, corruption and violence. Consequently this study suggest that party leadership should ensure fairness and transparency in the conduct of primaries so that results can reflect the choice of a majority of the party members vis-à-vis maintain the integrity of the party.

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