

**THE 2019 GENERAL ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRACY
IN NIGERIA**

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Abstract

The 2019 general elections has come and gone with the All Progressive Congress (APC) wining the general elections, while many opposition parties have gone to court to challenge the outcome of the elections. The elections marked the sixth uninterrupted general elections since the return to democratic rule in 1999. These elections took a cue from the preceding elections of 2015 that used electronic gadgets such as Permanent Voter's Card (PVC), card reader and other electronic devices in conducting the elections. The conduct of elections in Nigeria right from the colonial period lacked the essential ingredients of democratic electoral process, which are transparency, freeness and fairness. Elections in Nigeria have always been characterized by irregularities such as violence through snatching and destruction of ballot papers and boxes, violence during campaigns, manipulation of the process at different levels of decision making by politicians, corruption and fraud, rigging through ballot stuffing, falsification of election results and so on. The conducts of the 2019 General Elections were not completely free from fraud or irregularities in some parts of Nigeria. The objective of this paper is to examine the 2019 General Elections and democracy in Nigeria. The paper therefore, recommends among other things that for democracy to be fully achieved, the electoral process must be strengthened, elections must be violence free as democracy cannot survive in an atmosphere of chaos and trauma.

Keywords: Elections and Democracy

Introduction

It is generally believed that elections are pillars of democracy in any country, being a mechanism for which voters choose who will represent the local, state and national governments. Election ordinarily, in most democratic states is usually conducted by an institution set up by law in a given society. In some advanced democracies elections are such a routine matter that credibility and validity of each electoral process and cycle is assessed by the quality and performance of new technologies and innovation and how well such creative enterprises bolster the performance of the electoral management body and enhance voter confidence. It is therefore difficult if not impossible for democratic institutions to develop, take root and build a culture of professionalism and expertise necessary for the conduct of credible elections in a climate punctuated by military intervention and transitional governments. It is difficult to conduct election under virtually one party dictatorship and in a place where the incumbent government or regime have appropriated and privatized power. In such situations, the supremacy of law and the constitution is absent.

Representative government is often referred to as democracy where the authority of government is derived safely from the consent of the governed. The principal mechanism for translating that consent into governmental authority is the holding of free and fair elections. In Nigeria, the electoral process and

election administration have been terribly inefficient lacking in desirably attributes of free and fair elections, a situation that often precipitates violence and acrimony. There has been continued debate on how to get the electoral process and election administration right in order to pave way for a level playing ground for those seeking elective positions. Scholars such as (Alemika, 2004) have argued that elections are essential for democratic consolidation because they provide citizens with the opportunity of choosing between competing policies and parties, holding elected officials accountable for their actions and translating into political realities the symbolic notion that power or sovereignty reside with the people. Elections generally tend to promote political development if properly conducted, in the sense that apart from leading to the election of credible personalities to man various public offices to the common interest of the people, it leads to the strengthening and perfection of state structures and institutions. This is generally the practice in advanced democracies of the world such as the United States of America, Britain, France and Canada to mention a few. In these countries, because of the existence of positive political culture, they have a matured electoral process which tend to produce credible elections and candidates. The emergence of candidates in elections generally reflect the true wishes of the people. This makes the emerging leaders accountable and responsible to the yearning and aspirations of the people who elected them. By this, they enter into a social contract with the people by virtue of their elections and hence, pledge to employ every available resources to attract development for the people who they represent.

The main goal of the paper is to ascertain whether the 2019 General Elections were carefully planned and executed in line with international best practices or not. To also examine if at all, the 2019 General Elections have been able to produced credible political leadership as well as strengthened democratic institutions and structure for democracy to thrive. The paper takes the following structure: introduction, conceptual clarification, theoretical framework, election as a machinery for democratic governance, election and democracy in Nigeria, the 2019 General Elections and democracy in Nigeria, challenges of conducting elections in Nigeria towards consolidating democracy in Nigeria and the way forward.

Conceptual Clarification

For the avoidance of ambiguity and to ensure lucid understanding, the key words in this paper are explicitly defined. They are the concepts of election and democracy.

Elections:

There are varieties of the definition of elections in the literature. However, in this work, elections are regarded as the act or process of selecting or choosing leaders who will represent a group of people in government, and take major decisions on their behalf. This is therefore done in a process that begins with preparations, voting and its aftermath.

Election is a procedure of aggregating preference of a particular kind. It is the process of choosing between alternatives. Election, according to Ujo (2004) can be done in practice only through forms of procedure generally accepted as binding within the political society. It can also be defined as a form of procedure recognised by rules of an organisation whereby all or some of the members of the organization choose a small number of persons or one person to hold office of authority.

Elections are the technical means or institutions of ensuring popular participation in government by citizens who choose their representatives in conformity with the dictates of modern democracies and hallmark of legitimacy (Ejumudo, 2010). They are the rituals of choice and their binding character are derived from participation of the individual as a chooser in a social act which confers legitimate authority on the person chosen (Mackenzie, 1968). Adejumbi (1998) situates the symbolism of elections within the context of popular sovereignty and the expression of the social fact between the states and the people when he asserted that they are kernel of political accountability and a means of ensuring reciprocity and exchange between the governors and the governed. Elections constitute the central institution of democratic government, because of the fact that the authority of government is derived solely from the will and consent of the governed. This is why elections are regarded as a mechanism for

translating the consent of the people into legitimate governance and acceptable authority (Ejumodo, 2013).

Nnoli (1990) defines election as a the manner of choice agreed upon by a group of people which enables them to select one or a few out of many to occupy one or a number of positions of authority. This choice is usually agreed upon by a group of people which enables them to select one or a few people out of many to occupy one or a number of authorities. This choice usually involves rules and regulations designed to ensure a certain degree of fairness and justice to all concerned. In view of this, elections occupy a central place in the democratic process by providing representative government on one side, and as well, serving as an instrument of legitimization for the state and those who man the reins of power while at the same time ensuring political accountability to the people (Momoh and Adejumobi, 1999).

Nwolise (2007) on his part defines election as the process of selecting the officer's representatives of an organisation or group by the votes of qualified members. This may include an election to selecting a Vice - Chancellor, a corporate body choosing Chairman or Political party conducting primaries to choose the President of its party.

From the above explanations, an election may be defined as the practicability of choosing people through votes by the masses into government or political office(s) to rule for the generality of the people. Thus, it is imperative to note that, there cannot be democracy without elections hence they are regarded as pillar of democracy.

Democracy:

The concept of democracy has a variety of definition by different scholars and statesmen. The most popular of the concept is that given by a former American President, Abraham Lincoln who defined democracy as government of the people, for the people and by the people. This by implication is a government that the people rule through the process of electing leaders.

Democracy according to Okpe (2002) is a system of representative government operated under the rule of the law. It is a political system under which all, or the most significant groups in the population participate in the political process and have access to effective representation in the process of making government decisions, that is the allocation of scarce resources.

Enemuo (1999) views it as a set of ideals, institutions and processes of government that allows the broad mass of the people to choose their leaders who rule on their behalf. Diamond (1988) defined democracy as a “meaningful and extensive competition among individuals and organised groups (especially political parties) either directly or indirectly, for the major positions of government power”. The major elements of liberal democracy include, sovereignty of the people, respect for human life, the rule of law, liberty of the individuals, popular representation, purposeful leadership, welfare services, independence of the judiciary, conduct of free, fair and credible elections as well as social and economic upliftment of the people. (Ake, 1993, Diamond 1988 and Heater 1964). Heater further explains that democracy implies one man one vote, irrespective of wealth, religion, intelligence and so on. It also connotes equal rights and opportunity of all citizens to hold political office. It is generally about the desires, aspirations, development and welfare of the people.

Theoretical framework

The study adopts the Elite theory as its theoretical framework. The theory is associated with scholars like Michels, Mosca, Paneto, Mills etc. which underpins the role of the governing elites in determining who emerges or wins elections and positively governs, as well as the need to ensure adjustment between old patterns of state life and new demand and have encourage political participation, completion and political development.

The above situation is normally preceded with adequate preparations of the electoral process beginning with voter registration, an impartial and Independent Electoral Management Body (EMB), adequate preparations, and sensitization, of the electorate maintenance of internal party democracy within political parties and their candidates for free and credible elections.

Elections as Machinery for Domestic Governance

There is no one universally accepted definition of elections. Scholars and statesmen therefore conceptualise it from different perspectives and view-points. Generally, elections are considered to be the process of selecting or choosing a nation's political leadership or representatives. Edoh (2007) views elections as a procedure that allows members of an organisation or community to choose representatives who will hold positions of authority within it. He stated further that the definition is valid whether that procedure is at the national or sub-national levels. He argues further that since there is no one definition of election, there is also no one acceptable procedure for conducting elections, but instead there are many methods and procedures. For instance, the procedure in ancient Greece included voting by show of hands. While in modern societies today, however it is done through casting of ballots by writing or stamping, and in some situations, by electronic voting. In most parts of the world today secret balloting has become the preferred option. The mechanism of the process ranges from the use of simple ballot boxes to sophisticated voting machines in developed countries like the USA and Japan.

In support of Edoh's view, Johari (2009) asserts that there are two forms of casting votes. It could be by voters raising hands or by saying "aye" or "ney". This method according to him is referred to as open ballot or public voting while on the other hand, when the choice of a voter is not known to the public, it is referred to as secret balloting.

Elections are generally perceived as representing the most fundamental step towards constitutional democracy. This is because, elections enable citizens to participate in the political process and provide them with powers to initiate changes in the society. They create regular channels for political participation and furnish opportunities for citizens to evaluate and change leaders. They also represent a cornerstone for any democratic rule, as they deepen the concept of accountability which is central to constitutional democracy. This provides the citizens with the opportunity to choose their leaders and reject those they do not want. The conduct of free, fair, regular and credible elections therefore constitutes as Roth (2009) has aptly argued a very strong pillar for democratic governance, thus conferring and sustaining legitimacy and choice in the political process.

It is in the light of this that Edoh (2007) affirms that a free and fair election offers a level playing ground for the various factions of the society to articulate their feelings and as well politically market their preferred visions and candidates. He went further to assert that the outcome of elections is always very important because it confers legitimacy on the party that assumes powers after a free and fair election, noting that election results are a reflection of the collective wishes of the people in whom sovereignty is said to reside. What then is a free and fair election? Ujo (2004) posits that a free and fair election takes place when an election is conducted in accordance with the set rules and regulations to the satisfaction of all stakeholders such as political parties, candidates and voters, among others. This attribute is lacking in virtually all elections conducted in Nigeria including the 2015 general elections. Most of these elections observers have noted, fall below acceptable standards and have led to post-election violence and numerous litigations in courts (Zakaa, 2016).

Mackenzie (1967) has identified four conditions critical for free and fair elections. These are:

- (a). There should be independent judiciary to interpret electoral laws;
- (b). There should exist an honest, competent and non-partisan electoral body to manage the electoral process;
- (c). A developed system of well organised political parties to enable the electorates have alternatives, and as well make meaningful and well informed choices; and
- (d). A general acceptance by the community of certain rules of the game.

The above conditions presuppose an ideal, political analysts (Diamond, 2008; Omotola, 2010) have however argued that, the more elections are held in any state, in line with these ideals, the more they project the imagery of freeness and fairness. This implies therefore that the more elections are conducted in a country or society, the more the tendency for such a country to perfect the methods and processes leading to a credible election. What that means is that the older democracies of the world such as the USA, Britain, Canada, among others may have the capacity to overcome electoral challenges and conduct more free and credible elections than those younger democracies like Nigeria which is barely twenty years old. A free, fair and credible election is therefore the desire of every known modern democracy as it has the tendency to confer a legitimate and acceptable political leadership that could derive its authority from the electorate and as well be responsive and accountable to the people (Diamond, 2008; Omotola, 2010). In view of this, Mackenzie (1967) and Edoh (2007) have identified other salient features typical of a free, fair and credible election to include;

- i. The disqualification from voting of certain individuals such as lunatics, criminals and bankrupts.
- ii. Existence of secret balloting.
- iii. Adequate security for ballot boxes and other electoral materials.
- iv. The electoral registers must be displaced for voters on the day of election.
- v. Public counting of votes is supervised by returning officers.
- vi. Announcement of results of elections immediately after public counting of ballot papers.
- vii. Announced results must be a true reflections of the votes cast by the electorates.
- viii. Results must be capable of being challenged in the law courts, among others.

A Free and fair election creates some feeling of popular consent and participation in the general populace. The people have a sense of belonging and feeling that they have been consulted and that their wishes are respected. When an election is free and fair, it also makes it possible for one government to succeed another in an orderly manner, and without threats, violence and bloodshed. Such a government tends to be more responsive and accountable to the yearnings and aspirations of the people that voted it into power. Conversely, when elections are conducted in sharp deviation from known norms and practices, such elections hardly produce legitimate and acceptable political leadership that can bequeath democracy dividends to the people. However, such leadership traces its roots to the elite "power that be" that manipulates the electoral process to plant them for their self and pecuniary motives. This scenario appears to best capture the mode, nature and character of elections in Benue State and indeed Nigeria. The processes leading to the conduct of elections in Nigeria including nomination of candidates, voter registration up to the Election Day activities are often doctored by the power elites in collaboration with the election management bodies in order to subvert the wishes and opinions of the electorate. Through this collaboration effort, the "bottom billion" get elected (Collier, 2009). This implies therefore that the rich always buy their way into power without the proper consent of the people whom they claim to represent.

The above development according to Collier (2009) does not represent democracy but instead what he calls "democracy" when he aptly argues that

...a proper democracy does not merely have competitive elections; it also has rules for the conduct of those elections; cheating gets punished. A proper democracy also has checks and balances that limit the power of government once elected; it cannot crush the defeated...If there are no limits on the power of the winner, the election becomes a matter of life and death. If this life and death is not itself subjected to rules of conduct, the contestants are driven to extremes. The result is not democracy, I think of it as democracy (Collier, 2009 p,15).

It is also the submission of Enejo (2010) that after a decade of democracy in Nigeria, the country has not yet come to terms with the tenets of democracy deriving from the way it is practiced in the country. He pointed out that elections have always been a foul play with elements of massive rigging and politically motivated killings. The development, he says has posed a very serious threat to the growth and survival of the Nigerian state and its sustainable development. This is also the thinking of Agaba and Oholi (2015) when they noted that elections in Nigeria have always being a negation of known democratic norms.

Such elections they note, are characterized by rigging and violence perpetrated by political parties and their members who are out to influence electoral outcomes that may not favour them.

Election and Democracy in Nigeria

Despite repeated efforts by the Nigerian state to conduct free, fair and credible elections, and thus entrench democracy over the years, elections have always been characterised by a lot of challenges, thus threatening democracy in Nigeria. The country has continued with its long history of electoral frauds and competitive rigging, which have greatly stunted her political development, (Jega, 2008).

Elections in Nigeria were first organised and conducted by the colonial government in response to the pressures of the nationalists who were agitating for greater participation in the colonial administration. In 1922, Nigerians were offered the first opportunity to occupy certain political offices. Though, the franchise was restricted and representation limited, it was an achievement for the nationalists who were struggling for the enthronement of democratic order as a pre-requisite for greater participation of the people in the process of government. Elections were conducted after that, at different parts of the country to elect leaders at national, state and local levels. Although the 1959 General Elections was the first election that gave credence to an independent democratically elected government in Nigeria (Enojo, 2010).

A close study of Nigeria's political history since Independence shows a clear negation of the acceptable practices that could eventually lead to free, fair and credible elections and indeed an electoral process that could produce visionary and purposeful leaders that would lead the country to the path of political maturity and generally development. For instance in the First Republic, elections and voting were characterized by ethnic considerations, parochialism and regionalization by members of the emerging dominant class, particularly leaders of the three major political parties that dominated the political life and indeed the electoral process in Nigeria (Nnadozie, 2007). The 1964/65 Federal Elections which were the third General Elections in the country and the first since Independence were characterized by a lot of irregularities which most people described as "the most perilous display of brinkmanship" (Kirk-Greene, 1971:p21).

The elections ignited a lot of post election crises in the country which almost tore the country apart. These crises included the Action Group crisis and the subsequent trial of its leaders, and the 1965 western election crisis, (Nnadozie, 2007). This election (the 1964/65 Federal election) was generally characterized by bitterness, boycotts and electoral malpractices such as violence and snatching of ballot boxes. This development among others, no doubt led to the overthrow of the government by the military in 1966.

After many years of military rule, another chapter was opened for democratic government in 1979 with the lifting of the ban on politics in 1978 by Obasanjo's military junta. As a follow up, the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) was established with the mandate to register political parties and conduct elections across the country. Consequently, the Commission registered five major political parties. These were the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), the Nigerian People's Party (NPP), the Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP) and the People's Redemption Party (PRP). The 1979 general elections were conducted with remarkable improvements as compared with past elections. Generally they were characterized by minimal electoral violence and rancour even though some of the past irregularities were repeated (Nnadozie, 2007, Akintonde, 2007). This was largely because the country was changing to a presidential system of government for the first time and that Nigerians were to some extent tired of military government after plunging the country into a civil war that lasted for thirty months.

The 1983 elections were also conducted at the expiration of the four year term of the new democratic regime in the country. The 1983 elections were however a blatant display of irregularities and ills falling below the standard of elections. (Ngara, 2011) These elections were a clear manifestation of frustration-

Aggression hypothesis postulated by Dollard at the Yale University (Enejo, 2010). The NPN led government became frustrated because of its inability to tackle the social problems of poverty, hunger, inflation, injustice, inequality, insecurity, lack of basic human amenities and infrastructure such as roads, hospitals, access to basic health care and social security that characterized the regime. This made the people to become uninterested in the NPN led National Government believing they are the cause of their underdevelopment.

The inability of the NPN led government to fulfil her mandate to the people thus attract political development for them, and of course, the desire of the opposition political parties such as the Nigeria's Peoples Party (NPP) and the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) to take over power at all cost ignited electoral violence and other electoral irregularities across the country (Enejo, 2010).

Ngara paints the picture of what transpired during the 1983 general elections when he posits that: The election saw a return to the intimidation, rigging and outright elimination of opponents that had emerged as the defining features of those in the mid-1960s ... the nationwide elections were again marred by wide spread allegation of fraud and human rights abuses. In some areas, the campaigns were even bloody; many people even lost their lives in the run up to the elections ... vote buying was also common, ballot boxes were stolen; and result tallies were falsified .. the rigged elections became the immediate cause of the Military intervention in 1983 (Ngara, 2012 P.92).

The above therefore appears to be the nature and character of elections in Nigeria with their attendant consequences. Infact, a close study of subsequent elections in Nigeria, particularly the 1999 election has shown a mere perfection of electoral irregularities and gross cases of electoral rigging, making it difficult for leaders that truly represent true wishes of the electorate to emerge (Elekwa, 2008). This made Akintonde (2007) to aptly argue that elections in Nigeria generally fall short of international best practices, because they are often characterised by poor organization, lack of essential transparency, significant evidence of fraud in the areas of result collation, voter disenfranchisement, lack of equal contestations and many incidences of violence. These elections are generally adjudged to be mere chronicles of shame and deceit of the Nigerian populace, and were clear cases of betrayal of the electorate, as their outcomes did not in any way reflect the wishes and aspirations of the people (Akintonde, 2007).

Against the preceding background, this study is undertaken to interrogate the level of maturity of democratic institutions and structures in Nigeria which if played according to laid down rules and standard could auger well for credible elections. This is borne out of the fact that elections are part of the political system. Therefore, elections are integral part of the democratic system which derive its essence from the quality and credibility of such elections as its viability builds political development in the society. This could manifest in the quality of institutions, structures, value system, culture, education and behaviour of the society. This may however not always be well achieved under one election but a combined effort of elections.

Elections are considered veritable instruments for enhancement of democratically elected candidates. It follows relatedly therefore that democracy depends to a very large extent on the nature and character of elections and indeed the electoral process generally. An electoral process that produces a free, fair and credible election is more likely to give the electorate the opportunity to elect the right people with the right attitudes and values that can represent them well in government. Such leaders are more likely to be accountable and responsive to the yearnings and aspirations of the people that elected them into government. They are also more likely to effect positive changes in the processes, institutions and structures of the state that could move the nation forward.

On the contrary, whenever the electoral process is marred by irregularities, the right people may not get elected into government. Instead, people who do not have the right attitudes but are able to manipulate

their ways through the ballot box either by use of money to buy votes or through the support of political godfathers, may eventually find themselves in power. In such a situation, the leaders are usually neither accountable nor responsive to the electorate as such, attainment of liberal democracy becomes illusive. State structures, institutions and practices may begin to degenerate and to decay.

The above has been the nature and outcome of elections in Nigeria before 1999. The situation on many occasions led to the military takeover of government and the subsequent truncation of the country's democratic attempts as in 1966, 1983 and 1993. Infact, as a result, Nigeria has been battling with the task of achieving stable democracy. Between 1960 and 1999, the country went under civilian rule for only about eleven years (1960 - 1966, 1979 - 1983, 1992 - 1993), out of 39 years of the country's corporate existence. It means therefore that for a period of about 28 years Nigeria was under military rule which threatened the attainment of democracy. During this period, the country came under challenges of political participation, political stability, institutional and structural improvements, enhancement of the rights of the people and social order. Other challenges were that of lack of observance of the rule of law, lack of free and fair elections, political intolerance and lack of freedom for the mass media. All these threatened nation building. After many years of military rule, particularly after the aborted third Republic, Nigeria returned to democratic rule in 1999. The process of a return to civil rule was kick-started by the conduct of the 1999 General Elections which produced the President and Members of the National Assembly at the Federal level, and State Governors and Assembly Members at the state level as well as the local government executive and legislative councils at the local level. This ushered a new dawn in the history of Nigeria following several years of the military in government.

The above challenges were thought, could best be addressed under a democratic rule. Thus, when General AbdulselamiAbubakar announced the transition programme that ushered in the 1999 General Elections, it was received with wide jubilations. Nigerians had high hopes that the 1999 General Elections could usher in a new dawn in the political history and development of the country. The expectation was that through a free and fair election, government will become responsive and accountable to the people and there will be participation of the majority of the citizens in the political process of the society as well as decision making. It was also believed that military high headedness will pave way for the rule of law, political tolerance, freedom of the press among others. While attention will be shifted from the parochial way to national life which will in no small measure contribute to political stability and nation building.

The paper therefore, within the context of the above thinking also interrogated the level of maturity of political or state institutions and structures in Benue State with a view to seeing how their viability was made possible by the 1999 General Elections and how that has helped to build democracy in Nigeria. In other words the study examined how the 1999 General Elections were able to ensure constitutional order, political stability, the rule of law, political tolerance, the growth of political consciousness and political participation among twrhe electorate in Nigeria.

The conduct of the 2019 elections and democracy in Nigeria

This section is devoted to assessing or determining how well the 2019 General Elections were conducted and how that promoted constitutional order, rule of law, political stability, tolerance, political consciousness and participation. This section address the quality of the 2019 General Elections in Nigeria. In orderwords, the section seeks to asses the quality of the 2019 General Elections as it promoted democracy in Nigeria.

The 2019 General Elections had come and gone with the All Progressive Congress (APC) winning the General Elections while the opposition parties have gone to court to challenge the outcome of the elections. The elections marked the sixth uninterrupted General Elections since the return to democraticrule in 1999. These elections took a cue from preceding election of 2015 that used electronic gadgets such as Permanent Voter's Card (PVC), card reader and other electronic devices in conducting

the elections. The conduct of elections in Nigeria right from the colonial period lacked the essential ingredients of democratic electoral process which are transparency, freeness and fairness. Election in Nigeria have always been characterised by irregularities such as violence through snatching and destruction of ballot papers and boxes, violence during campaigns, manipulation of the process of different levels of decision making by politicians, corruption and fraud, rigging through ballot stuffing, falsification of election results and so on. The 2019 elections in Nigeria appeared to have recorded much more improvement compared to the previous elections of 2003 and 2007, and even the most recent elections of 2015. However the conduct of 2019 General Elections were not completely free from fraud or irregularities in some parts of Nigeria as there were a few cases of electoral malpractices in some parts of the country. This development has greatly undermined political development and democratic practice in the country right from colonial time.

The challenges of conducting elections in Nigeria

The practice of democracy in any given society in the world is associated with challenges of conducting elections. Nigeria not been an exception has the following challenges as summarised below.

Registration of political parties. This has always tended to exclude weaker or radical parties due to pressure exerted on the electoral agencies by the ruling government.

Lacking of funding. Insufficient funding has always hampered scheduling and designing of time-table for elections. Thus, getting stable sources of funding is a major challenge in the conduct of election in Nigeria.

The compilation and display of voter's register has been problematic as in many cases, the compilation starts late and ends early such that many voters are excluded. A case in point here is the 2011 elections, many people complained they could not register due to this problem.

There has been accusation of the incumbent government influencing the activities of the electoral agencies. There has been false counting and false declaration of election results.

Lack of neutrality in the expressed views and conduct of key election officials. The key challenge here is getting responsible and credible people of unquestionable integrity with non-partisan disposition.

The role of the judiciary has always been questionable. Election petitions are not done away with on time. Results of elections are hardly overturned in court even when it is evident that the case is in favour of the aggrieved party.

Towards consolidating democracy in Nigeria: The way forward

Nigeria's journey toward democracy consolidation is threatened by a lot of challenges which ranges from lack of free and credible election, non-tolerance of the opposition political parties, lack of matured political culture, lack of citizens participation, social and economic inequalities, absence of the rule of law to corruption among others. In the light of the above, the paper therefore, recommends that for democracy to be fully achieved, the electoral process must be strengthened, elections must be violent free as democracy cannot survive in an atmosphere of chaos and trauma. Both the 1999 constitution and Electoral Act be amended to provide stiffer penalties for the violation of electoral process.

Conclusion

The paper examined the elections in Nigeria with particular reference to the 2019 General Elections. Deriving from the nature and quality of the 2019 General Elections investigated, the following have been arrived at, that the 2019 General Elections witnessed some considerable level of credibility and transparency compared to the 2007 and 2015 General Elections. This was as a result of improvement in the conduct of the 2019 General Elections as it ensured the use of electronic gadgets such as Permanent Voter's Card (PVC), and Card reader and other electronic devices in the conduct of the General Elections. Also for Nigeria to have a sustainable democracy, all elections must endeavour to meet

minimum standards and the people must be willing to imbibe positive political culture and orientation that is changing the existing political order and behaviour. This should be complemented with structured and institutional reformations for better result.

There should be holistic review of the electoral laws to provide punitive measures that can be melted on any person caught aiding electoral malpractices no matter how highly placed. Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should collaborate with the Nigeria Communication Commission (NCC) so that voting will be done in a single day, and an electorate can sit at home and vote for candidates of their choice by texting to INEC a political party and candidates of his choice in a particular election.

As earlier mentioned, for democracy to be achieved in Nigeria, its elections and indeed electoral process must be strengthened. This will often produce quality leaders that are not only the rightful choices of the people but also committed to the political values cherished by the people. The process equally will produce a leadership that has the right attitudes and values that could enable it gainfully employ the resources of the country for the welfare of its citizens, and as well strengthen state institutions for effective service delivery.

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