

Highlights on 2019 Electoral Processes: Before, During and After

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Abstract

2019 general election is an historical epoch that calls for historical examination; this paper tend to analyze the political process that give birth to the government which emanated from this election since from sensitization, declaration for aspiration, campaign, election, declaration of winners and other historical events that cropped up afterward. This gives some impetus on the level of democratic advancement and weakness in Nigeria; hence this; the highlights of the processes involved in the entire election activities from various parties are pointed out. Primary sources that involves both principal actors and eyes witnesses are used as well some secondary sources.

Introduction

It is obvious that political parties in Nigeria have made so many giant strives to attain the national power base on the objectives that bring them on board. The major parties are seen visibly in action towards the conduct of 2019 election. These major parties were All Progressive Party (APC) and People Democratic Party (PDP).¹ meanwhile other parties were not also silent but were not as prominent as the two mentioned above. It is on this epochs which made up the central scene of the 2019 election is highlighted. The journey to fourth republic survived through three military leaders; General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida who styled himself military President, General Sani Abacha who maintained the traditional military style but short lifted by his death. And was succeeded by General Abdusalami Abubakar whose government gave birth to Fourth Republic which came into being on May 29, 1999.²

The last round the process began following the death of General Sani Abacha in 1998, when his successor General Abdusalami Abubakar

initiated the transition that heralded Nigeria's return to democratic rule in 1999. The ban on political activities was lifted, and political prisoners were released from detention facilities. The constitution was styled after the ill-fated Second Republic Presidential system.³ the electoral process kicked started in Nigeria with the registration of three political parties who pulled to the poll the general election in various posts up to the local government polls of 2018. The general elections based on party contest were held in 2009. Since then, general elections have been held in 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and the recent 2019. On each of the election more parties have been registered in various political modes which raised the number of the parties to ninety three (93) in 2019 general election.

Party Formation

The fourth republic party formation process began with the establishment of Independence National Electoral Commission (INEC) who has the constitutional power to register and deregister political parties. The registration of the political parties for the first time starts with INEC registering parties base on performance of local government polls or election conducted in 1998. From the above the political association that shows total commitment to the electoral process fills in candidates for the local government polls, such associations are PDA, APP and AD who were registered as parties. However, since then INEC successfully opened window of registration for more political parties in every general elections. Thus, in 2003, 2007, 20011, 2015 and 2019 more political parties were registered, bringing the total to ninety three (93).

The formation of these parties were ignored by perceived interest of few wealthy and opinion elites who come together not for the interest of the nation but to advance their course. They lack one clear ideology; hence this, manifesto differs not from each other. This made Obasango to describe PDP as an amalgam of different intent looking into leopard hand. In summary, strange people coming together to form party.

On the other hand, the inability of the so-called progressive who could not trestle power from PDP for almost sixteen years decided to come together to merged their parties and form All Progressive Congress (APC). Prior to these, Muhammadu Buhari who contested in 2007 under All Nigeria People Party (ANPP) broke away and formed

Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), but the most dramatic scene, was in preparation for 2019 election that more parties were registered. Most of these parties presence doesn't go beyond the local government of the party leader who doubled as the presidential candidate.⁴

Party Primaries

The wrangling issues around the 2019 general election started earlier before it time. It lingered around so many events such as Party Politics which stood as bottle neck to so many democratic achievements that would have stood as development to Nigeria democracy; this was as a result of politicians' interest over the national interest. It will be amazing to see a party whose sole aim was to fight corruption, inwardly assured it right hand politicians a predetermined automatic tickets just to save the party from the embarrassment of defection here and there in the country.⁵ This single act from national body affected even the local politics. The national body of All Progressive Congress (APC) had faded out the reality foresighted about it manifesto which have to fight against the kind of struggle for power by People's Democratic Party (PDP) in the past.⁶ At its national congress where the national executives were to be elected, this foresaw what can be described as automatic ticket, because of the way the party leadership members were only interested in elongating their stay in office without necessarily given democratic process within the party a chance to prevail. This was possible for the party because of the influence they had within the political system and the power they control in the centre as well as most of the states in Nigeria.⁷

People's Democratic Party (PDP) on its own side cannot be exempted from the processes analyzed above. But what made its own scenario not to be as obvious as that of the ruling party, was because of the minimal power it has; meanwhile, they perpetrated the prepared evil they know. it was clear that at the point PDP lost it power to APC, it counted on certain eminent as the source for the loss of power, this was seen in the single act of Adamu Muazu resigning his appointment as the national chairman of the party immediately after 2015 election.⁸ This singular action by the number one party member of the PDP is enough reason to linked up the earlier claim that PDP attached it failure to some of its eminent members. Based on this; the party's politics was set to rid out the bad eggs within the family.⁹ the party then had todug

deep to the grass root to bring it new leadership so as to regain power that was lost, but unfortunately it saw little or no progress as all its masterminded plans kept failing to their business as usual politics.¹⁰

Other parties were also busy pushing their way to seek for recognition from Nigerians but due to their little or insignificance space occupied in the political system, much attention was not paid to their activities; this led to some inconsequential formation of alliances with either APC or PDP before the general election. For instance, People Redemption Party (PRP) formed alliance with APC by rendering it support by handing it presidential mandate to the serving president (President Muhammadu Buhari PMB).¹¹ Also All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), Democratic People's Party (DPP) were among the parties that allied with All Progressive Party (APC). While in the other hand, parties like Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) allied with the opposition party of People Democratic Party (PDP)¹²

This suffered a lot of setback due to the attempts of these political parties trying to build politicians on a tattered foundation which they built during their congresses. All Progressive Congress (APC) in its own way of involving people from the grass root, introduced direct format of primary election. This was to involve members who are card carriers of the party to participate in the election of party candidature for various election process.¹³ This in anticipation was a great breakthrough on innovative that may sanitise Nigeria's politics. The innovation recorded success in the presidential primaries where there was only an aspirant; Muhammadu Buhari the serving president whose declaration to be reelected made the other aspirants to withdraw. We can then conclude that all party members and delegates produce the presidential candidate on conscientious

Some other visible examples were the cases of Senator David Umaru (Representing Niger East Senatorial District) with Alhaji Mohammed Sani Musa (AKA 313) whose national leadership of APC has assured automatic return ticket to his senatorial seat at the detriment of eligible candidate from the senatorial zone, this had dragged the two aspirants from the same party from poll to court where federal high court judgment favoured Sani Musa (313) while senator David Umaru later gained favourable judgment in the court of appeal. It was hoped

that supreme court judgment shall vindicate the real candidate. But, finally Alhaji Sani Musa was declared winner of the election¹⁴

Another glaring example is that of Imo State where the interest of the national leadership of the APC clashed with that of the state in the gubernatorial primaries. The incumbent governor Owele Anayo Rochas O. was having a candidate which he preferred to succeed him but the national leadership of the party has a different candidate at heart; this prompted the party national leadership to sink the state into political crises which caused a lot of confusions to the state even during presidential campaign. In fact, the party has lost the state governorship seat to PDP because of these supremacy of interest. The case of Ogun state also went the same with Imo, the only different is that APC still retained the gubernatorial seat.¹⁵

On the side of Rivers state; the state leadership of APC was factionalized into two, where Magnus Abe and Rotimi Amaechi who had served as the state governor have soul interest in helming the affairs of political structure of the state APC leadership. Thereby, causing a lot of legal battles within the factions.¹⁶ The effect of all these was that it denied the party the chance of fielding a candidate in all of the elections. Similar interest supremacy did not leave PDP untouched; as it was in Kano. The party has it plans before the defection of Senator Rabiw Musa Kwankwaso. The party national level seemed to lay structures in the ways it will be in favour of kwankwaso while the state leadership was not ready to succumbed. This led to the defection of prominent members of PDP to APC in the like of Senator Malam Ibrahim Shekarau; Kwankwaso's saga paved way for him (Shakarau) to win senatorial seat in his new party. The worst of all was the case of Zamfara state¹⁷ where the selfish interest of the party for not conducting a fair primary election for its members gave room for series of legal battle that started from the state high court, to court of appeal and finally the supreme court. And judgement of the supreme court ruled it that APC did not had a valid primaries and all votes casted for the party was "wasted votes" therefore the party that came runner up in the election having met the constitutional requirement of having one third (1/3) of the total votes casted should be declared winner of the election. This judgement has by extension given PDP victory in all the elective positions that were contested in the state from tip to toe. This was how party rascality gave PDP cheap electoral victory.¹⁸

While in some places like Niger state, the PDP big wigs were able to deny any influence aside their own in the affairs of the party, thereby making their decisions supreme in the party and in turn made it impossible for their unfavourable candidates to emerge as winners. Therefore, the favourable candidate was forcefully given path.¹⁹ In a nutshell, party politics cannot be said to be a process without progress; but a lot of bottle neck are attached to it, which Nigerians need to develop the means for proper solution if really we need reasonable progress in our democratic system.

Campaign for General Election (Vote Buying and Vote Selling)

Buying and selling is mostly known and attached to market services, however it became part of democratic dispensation in Nigeria 2019 election where it takes centre stage in electoral process in the course of 2019 election.

Primary elections before 2019 general election was highly characterized by vote buying and selling: for example; in presidential primary election of APC, it saw low rate of vote buying even though it was not in absentia but not so obvious because of the initial accord that gave the seat to the incumbent president (Muhammadu Buhari), but in the case of PDP; the election was characterised by exchange of hard currencies, which paved way for the highest bidder.²⁰ Wole Soyinka in his wise saying, said “it is only in Nigeria that you found former thieves regrouping to come back and steal, but youth who are directly affected are supporting them”²¹

This syndrome was there in other primary electoral processes like senatorial, House Reps, governorship and state assembly’s primaries. Therefore, the differences in the party’s electoral processes was that, the APC adopted direct mode of primaries which PDP on the other hand adopted its usual indirect primaries thereby opening extent of vote buying and vote selling to be wide.²²

It is obvious that, the APC as the ruling party has a wider space to cover as far as their primaries is concerned since their process is given voting rights to all card carrying members; in this case vote buying became hard to achieve hence some members’ ideology are not known to politicians. While, the PDP through its indirect format made it easy for vote buying and selling to be achieved since the targeted audience were few members of the party that has voting right of the party election.

Therefore, vote buying and selling was rampant at all levels of the primaries.

General election of 2019 posed a serious challenge that has never happened in the history of Nigeria democracy. Though election of sort has experienced similar incidents of postponement; for instance, 2011 general election was postponed by two days for late arrival of electoral materials in some parts of the country, when voting has started in some areas before the then Chairman of Independence National Electoral Commission (INEC) Prof. Attahiru Jega announced the postponement. 2015 general election also had a similar challenge by two weeks citing security reason as the cause of the postponement which was advised by then National Security Adviser to the then President Sambo Dasuki, while 2019 had it also at eight hours to the election citing logistic challenges as reason for postponement²⁰ despite the usual assurance that the electoral bodies continue to give on a daily basis. This saw a lot of condemnation from almost all the political parties and stake holders in the electoral process; therefore, the postponement was announced by the National Chairman of (INEC) Prof. Mahmood Yakubu from 16th of February to 23rd of February. This has raised a lot of eye brows, the governorship election was also affected by this postponement and was rescheduled from 2nd March to 9th March 2019.²³

A lot of skirmishes sprang up as a result of this postponement; those who travelled home to cast their votes were compelled to lose the chance of going back again to vote because of financial quagmire. All Progressive Congress (APC) summoned an emergency national executive council meeting of which the incumbent president as well as the presidential candidate of the party was fortunate to attend after traveling back to Abuja as a result of the postponement. A lot of issues were raised during this meeting where a lot of blames were channeled to INEC. There and then; the President made a pronouncement by giving the army and other security agencies a matching order that; “Anybody who intend to disrupt the process of election by engaging in ballot box snatching or trying to cause any violence during the election maybe doing so at the expense of his life.”²² This pronouncement of the president was greeted by a lot of condemnation and support by different political parties, election observers both domestic and international ones and other political activists.

Electoral Processes: Election and Electing

After the initial hiccup and postponement, election proper began on the 28th of February 2019 at 8:00am in some places while in other places they experienced late arrival of materials. Hence began election a bit late behind schedule. It was obvious to Nigerians that this election brought series of changes that can be counted as achievement to electoral process in Nigeria. These processes are intended to bring efficiency and timely manner in the conduct of the entire election process.

However, the improvements were meant to ensure that the intending voters were accredited on time and proceed to cast votes as against initial pattern where accreditation will be done first, then voting at some later hours. The new simultaneous accreditation and voting pattern was less cumbersome compared to the former pattern which was time consuming as well as exhausting the voters.²⁵

Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) also applied several technological devices in an advanced form that superseded the initial ways they are used to. E.g. Smart Card Reader (SCR) which is more effective than 2015 election except in some rear cases where it malfunctioned.²⁶

The INEC tracking devices to checkmate the conveying of the electoral materials to various vaults of Central Bank of Nigeria who took custody of the election materials, worked very well in the Central Situation Room that give adequate information to the national headquarter of INEC from their men on the field and some voters who have reasonable information to share with the commission. This in itself is an efficiency that brings successes to the conducts of 2019 general election.²⁷

The success of this election cannot be limited to the technological performances, but also reach it peak by the service of man power employed for the election. The youth Corps members, Civil Servants, Students and INEC officials contributed reasonably to the success of the election through the ad-hoc services they rendered. These successes also helped the timely collation and declaration of the results in various collation centre across the country. Except where there is little delay in the conduction of the election.²⁸

Added to the efficiencies of the election; another phenomenon erupted, as a result of level playing ground that was given to politicians

to make the election to be keenly contested for by political parties. Thus led to re-run of elections in certain states where rancor occurred or there was kin contestation between two opponents and the number of canceled votes is higher than the margin between the leading parties, the electoral commission would declare the election inconclusive and announced another date for re-run. This occurred majorly in senatorial, house of representatives, governorship and state assembly election.²⁹ There are several examples of such incidents as in Kano, Bauchi, Sokoto, Plateau and Benue gubernatorial election; while senatorial and house of representatives recorded up to thirty cases of inconclusive declaration also across the nation, state houses of assembly elections were also not left behind where there were cases of re-run election as well.³⁰

Short Comings and Challenges of 2019 General Election

The election indeed, recorded epochal hitches which is human characteristic. These hitches are either from the INEC or the larger population of Nigeria. It is obvious that this election cannot be devoid of vote buying and selling in all of the elections conducted.

The presidential election encountered vote buying and selling in another dimension different from that way it is seen in the primaries. Hence, general election involves individual's citizens with registered voters card whose population runs in millions; the politicians in some places made door to door distribution of commodities to cajole citizens for their votes. This by extension calls for explicit explanation to the voters by the politicians on how much they will pay the voters to gain their votes while in turn some voters negotiate with politicians on amount they want before the voting.³¹ In other ways; politicians used the chance of discouraging voters or low turn out to device another means or strategy of buying votes. E.g. they enticed the voters and pay them in return so as to go and cast the vote in favour of their (Politicians) party thereby denying them (voters) the free on their civic responsibility³¹

Another challenge faced by voters especially the semiliterate citizens who doesn't have much knowledge of voting process found it difficult to understand what INEC seemed to present in the presidential ballot paper: The number of the parties that participated in the presidential election was too much to the tune of ninety-one parties which made the paper to be too long and large to contain logos of these parties and

the spaces where voters are to thumb print. This alone caused a lot of invalid votes which ran to the tune of one million two hundred and eighty-nine thousand, six hundred and seven votes (1,289,647) out of twenty-eight million six hundred and twelve thousand one hundred and ninety (28,614,190) total votes cast at the poll officially declared by INEC.³³ This is so significant that Premium Times Newspaper said that, "It is therefore safe to say invalid votes emerged from the poll as the third largest political party in Nigeria."³⁴ By this revelation, it is obvious that this number of invalid votes would have helped a particular party aside the party that won the election to make the election a more keenly contested one which may lead the presidential election to a re-run race. This can also be attached to INEC inability to sensitize the semiliterate voters properly.

Post-Election Matters

The post electoral events have also constituted another historical epoch worth analyzing. this records includes so many grief exhibited by politicians most especially the opposition party that came second in the election. It all started with a lot of condemnation about the electoral processes from coordination of the election, collation of the results and the declaration of the poll results. They cited a lot of instances of irregularities as their claim for the condemnation of the entire process saying that they will not congratulate the winner because he did not win a free and fair contest which by extension means challenging the poll results in the court.³³ The drama also took another dimension when the opposition party lamented that from the result available on INEC server it is clear that the opposition i.e. PDP is the actual winner of the election. A claim which Independent National Electoral Commission debunked.³⁴

The opposition further announced that it will hire the service of ICT experts like Microsoft and others to ascertain the Originality of its claim before the election tribunal, but INEC swiftly told the opposition that the commission is not allowed by law to collate results electronically.

This dimension also led to another drama in the tribunal, where there were series of petitions hanging on the personality of one of the presiding judges of the tribunal. Justice Zainab Bulkachuwa who suddenly resigns from being a member of the tribunal with the claim that it's for personal reason even though there are clear claims by the opposition

that her Late Husband was a close allied of the incumbent president who is also a party to the issues in the tribunal. Also there was another claim that her son rigorously campaigned for the emergence of Buhari as the President which is a subject in the issue before the tribunal.³⁵

Conclusion

It is obvious from the foregone explanations that process of political development in Nigeria are coincidental but even with these series of challenges democracy is beginning to give itself a befitting seat in the country. Many accusing fingers were either pointed at politicians who supersede their interests over the national interest or the National Electoral Commission (INEC) for its inefficiency here and there. However INEC had in so many ways defeated politicians in the 2019 general election as it applied all avenues to prevent rigging; such was seen in the use of technological devices to track vehicles who carry electoral material, this was to avoid diversion of electoral materials, application of the rules that warranted re-run where invalid votes superseded the vote of the losing party, efficient services from INEC personnel both ad-hoc and tenure staff etc. at least Nigerians can be optimistic that a day is coming when they will elect a leader of their choice in a free and fair election

Endnotes

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