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CREDIBLE ELECTIONS AND CONSOLIDATION OF DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

By

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Abstract

The paper examines that e*lections are a critical part of the democratic process, and the existence of free elections is a major difference between democracies and totalitarian forms of government. Thus, credible elections play important roles in the furtherance and strengthen of democratic consolidation and good governance. The paper adopts the classical theory of democracy as its theoretical framework in order to have an insight into the subject under review. However, despite the country's efforts at ensuring credible elections, Nigeria is confronted with the challenges of conducting free, fair and elections. The paper recommends that there should be proper electoral law to guide the electoral process. The electoral body should be independent to conduct elections in lines with the electoral laws and global best practices. Appointments into the electoral body should be done by an independent body to avoid executive interference.*

Keywords: Credible elections, Electoral integrity, Democratic consolidation, Nigeria

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Introduction

Since Nigeria got independence in 1960, the quest to have free, fair and credible elections has been one of the major challenges of democracy and democratization process in the country. This is because as Woll (1978) puts it elections are a critical part of the democratic process, and the existence of free elections is a major difference between democracies and totalitarian or authoritarian forms of government. Thus, elections play important roles in the furtherance and strengthen of democratic consolidation and good governance. Generally, elections give the mass of the people the opportunities to have a say in who governs them and how they are governed. They ensure accountability of leaders to their citizens (Handelman, 2003).

Olaitan (2005) argues that experiences in third world countries have shown that democratic systems do collapse despite the holding of elections. Thus, election is only a component of electoral process, and electoral process encompasses issues such as the registration of voters, delimitation of the state into electoral constituencies, registration of political parties, reasonable level of freedom of expression, the establishment of a competent and independent electoral commission; successful conduct of elections under a free, fair and conducive atmosphere, the prompt release of election results and speedy but fair adjudication of election petitions by an impartial and independent judiciary (Lawal,2003; Okon, 2005). To enthrone durable and sustainable democratic practices, elections and electoral process must be treated together. This will ensure meaningful competition between/among individuals and organized groups for political positions through free and fair election.

Furthermore, elections legitimize government and the rights of leaders to govern. And legitimizing a government is an affirmation of the popular 'will' of the people which translates into acceptability and credibility of government, its policies, and actions. Therefore, the popular 'will' of the people which is generally expressed in the choice of leaders becomes the bases upon which government is formed. The United Nations (UN) rightly observed that 'the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government. This shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures'.

The above observation by the UN shows that, a government is accountable and democratic by virtue of the fact that it is formed through an electoral process, which is expressed in periodic and genuine elections. The international organization does not only posits that election is the heart of democracy and democratic government, but also it institutes a system of rules, guidelines, and structures that will guide the people or citizens in the choice of their leaders. Saka (2008) notes that a government is democratic if it comes to power through a transparent, free, fair, and competitive electoral process.

It is obvious to note that, though election is central to democracy and democratic government, but it is not the only part of the electoral process, for regular conduct of election only cannot ensure democratic consolidation and good governance in Nigeria.

Therefore, the paper examines electoral process, voting systems and procedures, democratic consolidation and what can be done to ensure free, fair and credible elections in Nigeria.

Clarification of Concepts

Election

Election is an institutionalized procedure for the choosing of office holders by some or all of the electorate and as such, it is a defining characteristic of modern democracy (Saka, 2008). And election is what distinguishes democracy and authoritarian form of government, as it involves the freedom of choice of both government and leaders. Election refers to the act of selecting or choosing candidates for an office through voting. It is a process or means which the electorates choose their representatives into government positions (Nwankwo, 2002). As in all democracies the electorates have constitutional mandate to choose their leaders in free and fair elections without legal, social and political obstacles. It is therefore a democratic right to give their mandate freely to political parties and candidates of their choice (Agwu, 2005).

Elections are also described as the processes and procedures by which citizens of a democratic country select either through direct voting or indirectly those who will represent them in the parliament and other positions in the government (Johnson, 1994). Ujo (2004) describes election as the procedure that allows members of an organization or community to choose representatives who will hold positions of authority within it. Election is associated with the concept of franchise or universal adult suffrage. Franchise or universal adult suffrage is in practice, voters are eligible to vote when they satisfy the following conditions: the voter must not be a criminal in the prison or a lunatic, the voter must be a citizen of Nigeria, the voter must attain the age of 18 years before he or she can be allowed to vote, the voter must have registered during the registration period to obtain voters card to enable him or her cast his or her vote on the day of election, and the voter may be required by law to reside in a place for a certain number of years, where he or she wants to vote.

Democracy

Democracy is a system of government in which the exercise of political power and authority is vested in the people through their elected representatives (Adedeji, 2013). The term democracy is derived from the Greek word “demo” means people and “kratia” means government. Democracy means government by the consent of the people where the majority rules while the minorities are protected. Democracy is either direct or indirect; the former is where people come together to discuss their common problems or welfare while the latter is where people elect their representatives to act on their behalf. Democracy is generally attributed to the concept of rule of law, constitutionalism, separation of power, checks and balances, periodic election, the presence of opposition and public opinion.

Theoretical Framework

The paper adopts the classical theory of democracy as its theoretical framework. The basic assumptions of the classical theory of democracy are that ‘‘power is vested in the people and its exercise is given to them or to their chosen representatives accountable to them for their acts of commission and omission. All decisions must be based on the consent of the people, whether expressed or implied, which, in practical terms, means the will of the majority. Thus, it stands on the premise that ‘people are always right’ (in theory), or the ‘decision of the majority is always correct’ (in practice)’’.

This theorization further opines that ‘‘people have certain natural and inalienable rights which the government cannot abrogate or diminish’…The classical or traditional doctrine of democracy has been in part a theory of certain original rights of men=a view that

government is made by virtue of those rights and must conform to them. The men have a natural right to participate equally in political power, just as they have a natural right to be free from enslavement or to appeal on equal terms to judicial tribunals for protection of their lives and property against assaults, trespass or encroachment of any kind. What is known as 'democratic method' is that institutional arrangements for arriving at political decisions which realizes the common good by making the people itself decide issue through the election of individuals who are to assemble in order to carry out its will.''

The classical theory of democracy has a unique appeal when the opinions or contributions of some idealists like Rousseau and Green are being looked into. According to Rousseau ''democracy only ensures the prevalence of the 'general will'. In every community there is a section of really selfless and enlightened people who think in terms of public interest and it is the inherent force of their selfless argument that ultimately prevails in any matter under discussion before a body of the people''. This idealistic prepositions of Rousseau caught the attention of Green, where he opines that ''The sovereign should be regarded not as any abstraction as the wielder of coercive force, but in connection with the whole complex of institutions of political society. It is as their sustainer and thus the agent of the general will, that the sovereign power must be presented to the minds of the people. If it is to command habitual obedience and obedience will scarcely be habitual unless it is loyal and forced.''

Though, classical theory is criticized that it is too idealistic. As observes by Johari (2014) the theory ''is thoroughly normative. It is loaded with high ideals and bombastic propositions like 'general will', 'people's rule', 'people's power', 'common good', and the like cannot be subjected to empirical verification.'' The classical theory of democracy sees government as a majority activity; and sees people as the basis upon which government drives all its powers and authorities.

Electoral System

An Electoral System involves procedure, modalities and methods by which people are elected into various positions in government. Electoral systems are methods or arrangements through which persons are elected into parliament or other governmental positions (Nwankwo, 2002). Electoral process is divided into different types, and each has its own attributes. Below are some of them:

First Past the Post or Plurality System: This is the type of electoral system in which the candidate who scores the highest number of votes is elected. In this type of electoral arrangement the group with the majority always carries the day; the minorities are often marginalized and unrepresented. Though the plurality system is easy to operate but it is highly unrepresented; it does not show the true picture of the various interests in a country.

Second Ballot System: In this type of electoral arrangement, to be elected a candidate must obtain or get a 2/3 majority of the total vote cast in the constituency. If at the first ballot no candidate obtains the required majority, a second voting otherwise known as second ballot becomes inevitable. In this regard the candidate or candidates with the least number of votes are to withdraw before the second ballot takes place (Eyiyere, 2003). The candidate with the highest number of votes at the second ballot is declared the winner. This system of electoral arrangement allows the candidate with the highest number of votes to emerge as the winner of the pool. Thus, the system gives room for the formation of different parties and coalition government which may bread instability in the polity.

Alternative Vote System: In this type of electoral structure the candidate with majority of the total votes emerges as the winner. The names of the candidates for the elections are

written broadly on the ballot papers. Each individual voter is required to indicate against each name in the order of preference by ticking; and after the voting the ballot papers are sorted out in accordance with the first preference and counted. At this point if no candidate secures majority, then the votes of the candidate with the least number of votes are distributed to the other candidates in accordance with the second preference shown on them; and the votes are recounted for the second time. This process will continue until one candidate secures a majority of the total vote cast and emerges as the winner. This electoral system creates room for the emergence of candidate with majority as the winner and also the system is highly representative. Through the system breads instability and it is difficult to operate as it leads to the proliferation of political parties.

Proportional Representation: This is the type of electoral system that is operated in a multi-member constituency where each political party will be required to fill its candidates for the elections. In this regard, candidates who score the highest votes are deemed to have been elected.

A proportional representation is the most democratic system of election as it gives fair representation to all interest groups in a country; and eliminates the marginalization of minority groups. If there are five seats in the constituency, the first five candidates with the highest votes are elected. The main problem with Proportional representation is that, it breads instability and makes choice difficult for the voters because of the multiplication of political parties.

Election Related Concepts

By-Election: This is an election that is organized or conducted to fill a vacant elective seat; the vacancy occurs as a result of disqualification, resignation or death of the individual holding that office. The election is conducted only in that constituency where the vacancy exists. Only the registered voters in the constituency are allowed to vote.

Run-Off Election or Second Ballot: This is an election that is conducted when none of the candidates wins the election by absolute majority, in a general election; another election would be conducted and the candidates with the highest votes are allowed to contest in the second round. In the end the candidate with the highest majority will be declared the winner after the second ballot.

Primary Election: This is an election conducted within a political party to choose credible candidates that can adequately represent the interest of the party in any election in the country. The political parties present credible candidates that could win the mind of the public for any election in a country.

General Election: This is a form of election in which all voters or electorates in a country exercise their **Referendum:** Referendum sometime refers to as plebiscite: This is a 'Yes' or 'No' vote of the people to settle certain political issues in a country. Sometimes a referendum is conducted to make sure that laws made that are not in conformity with the popular will of the people are not enacted or passed by the legislature. Some national issues like minority issues, state creation etc are decided through a referendum.

Supplementary Election: This is an election conducted to conclude election that is inconclusive. Only the registered voters in the affected areas are allowed to vote. For instance when election was declared inconclusive in Bayelsa State, a day was fixed by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to conclude the election that produced Mr. Sirieke Dickson of the People Democratic Party (PDP) as Governor, and in Kogi State

supplementary election was conducted at the instance of the demise of the APC leading candidate, Late Prince Abubakar Audu on the election day saw the emergence of the second runner at the All Progressive Congress (APC) primary election, Alh. Yahaya Adoza Bello as the elected governor of Kogi State.

Voting System

Voting system involves a method through which voters make a choice between or among competing options in an election. A voting system entails rules and regulations for valid voting and how votes are counted and aggregated to produce a definite result. However a voting system specifies the form of the ballot, the set of allowable votes and tallying method, how voting power is distributed among the voters and how voters are divided into subgroups (constituencies) whose votes are counted independently.

Types of Voting

Secret Balloting: This is the type of voting in which the voters cast their votes secretly. That is to say that the voters alone make the unanimous decision in the voting exercises. In this regard, the ballot papers inscribing the names of the political parties and their symbols, ballot box and ink pad etc are some of the materials required for secret voting. Secret voting is highly democratic. It preserves the right of the voter to cast his vote independently as he is free from being intimidated. It gives the voter freedom of choice and a sense of direction in exercising his Franchise. But on the other side of the coin, secret balloting is difficult to understand. Its time consuming and cost to operate particularly in a society where there is high rate of illiteracy.

Open Balloting: This is the type of voting in which voters cast their votes openly. Under this type of voting system voters will have to queue according to their political parties. Counting of the votes is done and the results declared on the spot by the presiding officer before everybody present. Open balloting reduces electoral malpractice; it is simple to operate; and less expensive. It gives the voters the awareness and a sense of trust as votes are accounted publicly and election results released immediately. But open balloting is prone to rigging as voters can be pressured to vote for government officials or government sponsored candidates leading to manipulation of election results and violence.

Open-Secret Balloting: This is the type of voting in which a voter cast his vote openly but secretly. The voter after being accredited by the presiding officer picks a ballot paper with inscription of political parties and their symbols, goes to a demarcated place to thumb print with an ink and inserts the thumb printed ballot paper into the ballot box. By this act the veto makes an independent decision in the voting alone. Nigeria operated this type of voting in 2011 and 2015 general elections. Some good things about open-secret balloting is that it is highly democratic; it gives the voters the independent mind to express their electoral feelings by voting party or candidate of their choice thereby making government legitimate and acceptable. But in the contrary, voters can be intimidated or bought off before elections are conducted.

The Role of some Agencies and Bodies in an Election

The Mass Media: This is made up of radio, newspapers, magazines and pamphlets. The media serve as an outfit through which the views and manifestoes of the parties are articulated and educate the people on issues of national leadership, Daily Times, Nigeria News Day, The Punch, Daily Trust and electronic media.

The Police: The police is an institution of the state that is responsible for the general maintenance of law and order. It deals with hooligans and thugs during and after elections to ensure free and fair elections.

Mass Mobilization Agencies: Bodies like National Orientation Agency and Transition Monitory Group comprising of different Non-governmental organizations educate the people on how to vote, the need to vote, where to vote and the implications of double voting.

Election Observers: Observers from other parts of the world and bodies like United Nations Organization, the Common Wealth of Nations, the African Union, are allowed to monitor and evaluate the election exercise and educate the international community about what happened during the election. Non Governmental Organizations and Civil Society Groups organize conferences and symposiums to educate the people on electoral matter, democratic values and ideals.

Traditional Rulers: Traditional rulers are the custodian of the people's culture in their various communities. They educate their subjects on the need to embrace peace during and after the elections to ensure the formation of legitimate government that can stand the test of time.

The Electoral Body: An electoral body is responsible for the conduct of elections in any democratic state. In Nigeria, the Independent National Electoral Commission is the body that is charged with the responsibility of conducting election, delimitating the country into constituencies, registering political parties and eligible voters, providing ballot papers and voting materials, recruiting and training of electoral officials like Presiding Officers, Polling Officers, Polling Agents, Returning Officers and others. An electoral body in Nigeria is headed by a chairman, and supported by other officials like the commission's secretary, regional electoral commissioners, state electoral commissioners and other electoral officials. The commission should be given free hand to deliver on its constitutional mandate.

Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria

Popular participation entails mass involvement of the citizens in the political processes of their country. This presupposes that every citizen has the right to participate in the political process in whatever capacity he deems fit. Every citizen has the right to vote, belong to a political party or association of his choice, and be voted for…Popular or full participation of citizens in politics is an indication of democratic development. The inputs into the democratic process of every citizen, irrespective of his standing in the society are important and cannot be wished away (Henry, 2008).

The 1999 constitution, in section 40 guarantees the right to assemble freely and associate with other persons. A person is free to form or belong to a political party, trade union among others for the purpose of protecting interests. But the constitution forbids the formation of any association that is unhealthy or inimical to the peace and security of the society. Therefore, belonging to a political party is a right not a privilege and contribute to democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Thus, political party is a group of people with similar ideas, beliefs, and principles that come together to take over the machinery of government through election (Ali, 2018). According to Ranny, (1976) clarifies that political parties ''are autonomous organized group that makes nomination and contests elections in the hope of eventually gaining and exercising control of the personnel and policies of the government.'' (Nwankwo, 2003) looks at political party as an organized group of individuals seeking to seize power of government in order to enjoy the benefit derived from such control (Nwankwo, 2003).

Political parties are the conglomeration or association of men and women with broad, common interest who want to influence or control decision making in government by electing political candidates to public office (Adedeji, 2013). The 1999 Constitution provides that political parties include any association whose activities include canvassing for votes in support of a candidate for election to the office of President, Vice President, Governor, Deputy Governor or Membership of a legislature, House or of a local government council (Mmuozoba, 2006). The presence of political parties encourages competition between/among individuals and groups in the political process; strengthens democracy and democratization process in the country. Nigeria has ninety one (91) registered political parties according to Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and Nigerians have the opportunity to belong to any political party of their choice.

The development of political parties is a critical indicator of the dividend of democracy, where the democratic process permits the systematic growth of the parties... The growth and development of political parties are suppose to be organic, where ideas, interests and membership are allowed to flourish in order to arrive at an ideology that guides the growth of the party from the local level to the national level (Henry, 2008). The Nigerian political parties are suppose to be national in nature and character in growth and development, as government is formed through a political party; and political party charts a roadmap for the country through its manifesto which translates into government policies.

One other issue that is significant to democratic consolidation in Nigeria is the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), a body whose constitutional mandate is to conduct elections at the national and state levels in the country. According to Henry (2018) ‘’The Electoral Commission is saddled with the responsibility of conducting credible elections in order to garner the confidence of the people in the electoral process. The Commission is expected to be honest, unbiased, educate the masses on electoral processes and be accountable to the electorates in reflecting their choice of leader.’’

The INEC ought to be independent in the true sense of the word, for the electoral body to be able to conduct free, fair and credible elections. The electoral body needs to be free from executive, legislative, and judicial influences; and the influence of the powerful people in the country. Henry (2018) observes that ‘In Nigeria, INEC Chairman, its Commissioners, and the State Resident Commissioners are appointed by the President. The funding of the Institution is also a function of the executive…So long as the electoral institution is under the tutelage of the executive, it cannot be said to be independent and by implication, cannot produce the needed dividends of democracy. A situation where the wishes of the people through their votes cannot be reflected correctly, then the process that leads to the dividends of democracy has been polluted.’

The issue of the electoral body being dependent on the executive is not healthy for the growth and development of democracy and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The effect is that the Nation is not likely to have free and fair elections, as the saying goes he who pays the pipers dictate the tones. Though, the 1999 constitution established the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to conduct national and state elections. As an institutional framework for elections, it has a major role in the conduct of free and fair elections’’ (Okon, 2005). This role of conducting free and fair elections will be hampered if electoral body is not liberated from the executive. An overhaul of the nation’s electoral laws need to carried out to free the electoral body from all forms of controls, make political parties functional and politicians reasonable and committed to nation building.

Also of importance to this very issue democratic consolidation is the freedom of the press. The press or media is described as ‘’the watch dog of the society’’. The press as the watch dog of the society is to inform, educate and even entertain, while carrying out its constitutional role. The press is also saddled with the duty of enlightening, educating, and reporting events as they unfold in the democratic process (Henry, 2008). The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provides that every person entitled to, freedom of expression including freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas as well as information without hindrance. Also a person can own, establish and operate a press.

However, for security reasons this freedom of expression and the press can be restricted by law especially among public office holders such as Politicians, Armed Forces, Nigeria Police Force and the Government Security Agencies or Services established by law.

Further more democratic consolidation can be guaranteed under there is rule of law, constitutionalism, accountability, and due process. Rule of law presupposes supremacy or predominance of law over all members of the society. Aristotle had argued that law should govern and those in positions should be servants of laws. This implies that rule of law is associated with constitutional government and absence of dictatorship. However the doctrine of the rule of the law is without doubt intimately bound with the practice of democracy (Emmah, 2006). Tambuwal (2013) observes that the term rule of law encompasses all it takes to uphold, promote and safeguard the supremacy of law over any proclivities of institutions, groups or individuals.

Credit for coining the concept of Rule of Law goes to A.V. Dicey. In his book titled *Introduction to the Law of the Constitution* published in 1885 describes the rule of law as absence of arbitrary power. Dicey says:

> ‘’Rule of law implies the absolute supremacy and predominance of regular law as opposed to the influence of arbitrary power, and excludes the existence of arbitrariness, or prerogative or even wide discretionary authority on the part of government. Citizens are ruled by the law and by the law alone. A man may with us be punished for a breach of the law, but can be punished for nothing else’’.

The rule of law is guided by three basic principles: supremacy of the law, equality before the law and fundamental human rights. He goes further to say that those in position of authority should rule in accordance with the provisions of the constitution and be subjective to the law of the land. It presupposes that government itself is subordinate to the law.

Free, Fair and Credible Election

Electoral process involves different stages: voter’s registration, political party’s registration, delimitation of the country into electoral constituencies, establishment of independent electoral body conduct of free and fair election, prompt declaration of election results independent judiciary to determine election petitions. Election is said to be free and fair if it is free from intimidation, molestation and interferences from the government and powerful individuals in the society. It is a situation where a voter is free to cast vote according to his or her wish without any intimidation, harassment, inducement or coercion (Nwankwo, 1990).

Problems of Free, Fair and Credible Election

The major problems of free and fair election are:

The undemocratic nature of our political parties is one of the major problems of credible elections in Nigeria. Political parties right from independence to date have not been nationalistic, they represent regional, ethnic/tribal and cultural sentiments; and governments are formed on the bases of these undemocratic foundations: Action Group (AG), for West, Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) for the North, National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) for the East. In the 2nd republic National Party of Nigeria (NPN) dominated the politics in the North, Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) dominated the West, and Nigeria People's Party (NPP) dominated the Eastern states. In the current democratic dispensation Alliance for Democracy (AD) dominated in the West, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) dominated in the Eastern states and All Nigeria People Party (ANPP) in the Northern states. And with merger of some political parties in 2014, All Progressive Congress (APC) predominated in the North and West, while the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) dominated the South/Eastern states. Electoral behaviours in Nigeria are influenced by all these undemocratic sentiments of religion, region, and tribe/ethnicity. The nation is bound to be facing the crises of identity and division if political parties upon which governments are formed project and promote regional and tribal agendas (Ali, 2018).

Political parties lack capacity to regulate and control their members and their activities. Sometimes political parties find it difficult to conduct credible primary elections in order to produce candidates that will stand for her at the general election. And the inability of the political parties to settle intra party disputes compel some party members to drag themselves to court over who is the authentic candidate of the party. This act is very disastrous to internal democracy, as party members are likely to be sworn enemies and this can lead to disorder, and anarchy within the party in particular and the country in general. Political parties are platforms through which people choose their leaders to represent them at the legislative and executive levels and anything wrong with them will affect the conduct of elections in the country.

The undemocratic nature of our political culture affects voter's behavior in particular and political system in general. The political class or the politicians see politics as a do or die affair, where they are bent on capturing power after power and winners take all. This act reflects the wishes of a few politicians who impose themselves on the people and handpicked clients for the various elective positions. The Nigerian politicians are highly unstable; they move from one political party to another to remain in power. Of recent some top politicians defected from one party to the other: The Senate President, Dr. Bukola Saraki, defected from the All Progressive Congress (APC), to Peoples Democratic Party, (PDP), Senate Minority Leader, Senator Godswill Akpabio defected from the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), to the All Progressive Congress, (APC), The Speaker, House of Representatives, Hon. Yakubu Dogara defected from the All Progressive Congress (APC), to the Peoples Democratic Party, (PDP), The Governor of Sokoto State, Hon. Aminu Waziri Tambuwal defected from the All Progressive Congress (APC), to the Peoples Democratic Party, (PDP), Senator Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso defected from the All Progressive Congress (APC), to Peoples Democratic Party, (PDP) among others. This unnecessary defection is not healthy for democracy, as the poor illiterate electorates are often confuse in terms of who to vote and how to vote.

The high cost of nomination and expression of interest forms by two main political parties is a challenge to free, fair and credible elections in Nigeria. Political parties charge millions of naira for nomination and expression of interest forms. High nomination fee implies that only few who have the money carries the day, and this situation is likely to promote corruption and scuttle the nation's effort at democratic consolidation. For a person to aspire to be a presidential aspirant of APC, the person has to doll out N45 million, the fees for governorship aspirants at N22. 5 million, senate N7 million, Reps N3.85, state assembly N850,000; in addition the female and physically challenged aspirants will pay 50 percent of the prescribed fees for each position. The PDP for one to aspire for president, the person is to pay N12 million, governorship, 6N million, Reps N2. 5 million and State House of Assembly, N600,000.

The high nomination and expression of interest fees will corrupt the politics and make politics a do or die exercise… Monetization of our politics does not make any sense, more so that the country faced with the problem of 'vote buying' that rightly was noted during the recent gubernatorial election in Ekiti State. Thus, high cost of nomination fees by the political parties will only add more salt to the wound; the moneybags and godfathers are likely to hijack the political process and eventually the 2019 elections (Ali, 2018).

Non tolerance of opposition is a big challenge to credible elections in Nigeria. Political parties in powers are always accused of terrorizing opposition parties, denying the oppositions the opportunity to have a level play grounds in carrying out its activities like rallies, and campaign in government own media houses, agencies and newspapers. Popoola (2004) observes that there have been several instances in Nigeria where thugs were hired by desperate politicians with the main objective of bulldozing opponent into passivity.

The electoral body is underfunded. This makes it difficult for the body to give enough training to their staff and compounds the problems of logistics. The electoral officials may be corrupt and may be induced with money by the politicians to declare results in their favour. Government and powerful politicians often interfere in the activities of the electoral body.

The high rate of illiteracy and low level of political education among the electorates make it difficult for them to assert their rights. There are frequent cases of double voting and voting by under age children, stuffing of ballot boxes with ballot papers.

How to Ensure Free, Fair and Credible Election in Nigeria

The joy of any democratic nation is to conduct free, fair and credible election and Nigeria is not left out in this democratic expectations. Therefore, the main ways to ensure credible elections in Nigeria are:

Strong Federal Government: A strong, viable and dynamic federal government that has the capability and capacity in terms of strong will and commitment to provide the enabling political environment devoid of intimidation, molestation and vendetta where all shades of opinion can be accommodated and expressed.

Strong and Independent Electoral Body: The electoral body in case of Nigeria the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) backed by fiscal and legal support must be independent and non partisan to discharge its constitutional duties without any fear or favour and the exclusion of membership of a political party as a requirement for the electoral body.

Division of country into constituencies: The electoral body should have a better knowledge of the electoral geography of Nigeria in its efforts to divide the country into different constituencies to ensure equitable and equal representation. This is done to make sure that all interests or sections of the country are adequately represented to allay fear of ethnic or sectional domination.

Funding of the Electoral Body: The electoral body should be well funded to enable her carry out her duties effectively.

Registration/Review of Voters Register: The electoral body should in accordance with the provision of the constitution engage in continuous voter's registration nationwide; regular and display of voters register to make sure that the voters register is reliable and up-to-date.

Independence of judiciary: The judiciary must be independent to restore the integrity of the judicial process by ensuring that the courts are independent of the executive and the political class; and also to interpret the electoral laws and adopt procedures which will ensure that election problems are disposed off within a very short time.

Political Education: The electoral body, political parties, non-governmental organizations, religious bodies, traditional rulers and such agencies like National Orientation Agency (NOA), civil society organizations should educate the electorates on the need to demonstrate a sense of maturity and never allow sentiments to determine their electoral behaviours; and educate the electorates on how to cast their votes and the dangers of multiple voting. Pressure groups and the press must be ready to expose all forms of electoral malpractices. The result of election should be announced immediately once counting is completed.

Secret Ballot System: Secret ballot system of voting should be adopted where voters will have an independent mind to cast their votes without any fear of intimidation and molestation from the government as well as the political class.

Law Enforcement and Security Agencies: Adequate security arrangement must be intact to make sure that all law enforcement agencies like the police, civil defence deployed for elections are properly equipped with transportation and communication facilities to communicate when the need arises. They should create a conducive atmosphere during the elections and resist any attempt to use them to carryout electoral fund.

Recruitment of Electoral Officials: The electoral body should not only recruit electoral officials and ad-hoc staff but also train and retrain staff in respect to election matters and to ensure that they understand voting procedures and other electoral processes.

Creation of Employment Opportunity: Government should provide jobs and enabling environment where business thrives to enable the teeming youths has something to do for a living. This can be achieved through skill acquisition, education, loans etc. This will go a long way in reducing the problem of electoral violence and thuggery in the country.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The paper concludes that since Nigeria got independence in 1960, the quest to have free, fair and credible elections has been one of the major challenges of democracy and democratization process in the country. This is because elections are central to democratic process, and the existence of credible elections is what distinguishes between democracies and dictatorial forms of government. Experiences in third world countries have shown that democratic systems do collapse despite the holding of elections. Election is only a part of

electoral process, and electoral process includes among other things like registration of voters, delimitation of the state into electoral constituencies, registration of political parties, freedom of expression, the existence of a competent and independent electoral commission; successful conduct of elections under a conducive atmosphere, the prompt release of election results and speedy but fair adjudication of election petitions by an independent judiciary.

It is obvious to note that, though elections are critical to democracy and democratic government, but it is not the only component of the electoral process, for regular conduct of election only cannot guarantee democratic consolidation and good governance in Nigeria.

The paper recommends that:

i. Political parties should encourage internal democracy where party candidates are chosen based on formal procedures provided in the party constitution to avoid unnecessary litigations and confusions in the political system.
ii. There should be proper electoral law to guide the electoral process.
iii. The electoral body should be independent to conduct elections in lines with the electoral laws and global best practices.
iv. Iv. Appointments into the electoral body should be done by an independent body to avoid executive interference.
v. There should be training and retraining of electoral officials to acquaint them with skills on how to handle electoral issues effectively.
vi. There should be constant voter's registration; and display of voter's register.
vii. There should be independent of judiciary to enable her adjudicate without any fair or favour.
viii. The voters should be honest at election, they should not allow their sense of emotion overcome their sense of reasoning, they not allow themselves to be bought at election by desperate and corrupt politicians or their agents.
ix. The election observers, civil society organizations, traditional institutions and religious bodies should educate the electorates to behave themselves before, during and after election.
x. Enough security should be provided to maintain law, order and arrest electoral offenders.

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