

ELECTION CRISES AND DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN NIGERIA SINCE 1999

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ABSTRACT

Election has been a major factor in Nigeria's political development since independence, even in pre-independence era, it played significant role both at the national and regional levels. The beauty, as well as successes of democracy begins with free and fair elections. The latter also serves as route to sustainable development. Experience of democracies in developed world showed that election can be a veritable ingredient of democratic consolidation. However, in developing countries like Nigeria, most of the elections have been characterized by crises, which directly impede the sustenance of democracy and development. The paper explored and analyzed election crisis in Nigeria and its implication on democratic consolidation and development using content analysis method. The findings revealed that indicators of democratic consolidation are conspicuously absent in Nigeria. Conclusion reached by the paper is that democracy is yet to be consolidated in Nigeria, as it can only be possible in elections devoid of crises and or conducted in peaceful environment.

Key words: Crises, Democracy, Development, Election, Electoral Violence, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

In every modern society, election and democracy are classified as essential ingredients of development. Electoral politics began in Nigeria in the 1920's with the introduction of elective principles by the 1922 Clifford Constitution. This constitution was very symbolic as it served as a landmark in the electoral history of Nigeria. Nigerians were, for the first time allowed to exercise their political rights by voting their own candidates during elections (Ezera, 1960). Consequently, other constitution that emanated after 1922 improved on the elective principle. These preceding constitutions further expanded the scope of electoral participation.

There is no doubt that election has been a factor in Nigeria's political development since independence, even in pre-independence era, it played significant role both at the national and regional levels. But the fact remain that post-independence elections in Nigeria have a unique feature of crisis, which has gone a long way in affecting the democratic ideals and developmental ethos (Lawal, 2005).

In May, 1999, Nigeria made a successful post-democratic transition after almost two decades of military authoritarianism and the rule of impunity. The inauguration of the countries fourth republic thus marked a renewed sense of optimism and great expectation by Nigerian citizens and members of the international community. The much awaited democracy was therefore instituted, people had high hopes that this new wave of democratic politics in Nigeria would be characterized by the nurturing of a civic political culture that is conducive for rule of law, respect for human rights, consolidation of institutional transparency, and indeed the political accountability of the elected officials.

Nevertheless, the past fifteen years of democratic experimentation have been characterized by undemocratic tendencies, rather than consolidate the "hard earned" democracy and after elections. This unwarranted attitude (election crisis) has continued to affect generally, the political development and particularly, sustenance of democracy in Nigeria. This ugly trend and perhaps, the implication make this work inevitable.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The paper is set to achieve the following objectives;

- To examine the role of election in democratic consolidation
- To assess the level of democratic consolidation in Nigeria's democracy
- To identify the causes of election crises in Nigeria
- To examine the effect of election crises on democracy and democratic consolidation

- To contribute to scholarship on the need for democratic consolidation in developing countries
- To make viable recommendations capable of solving election crises and facilitating democratic consolidation in Nigeria

CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

Some basic concepts that are relevant to this study are reviewed and analyzed for the purpose of clear understanding of the content to which these concepts are being put into use.

The Concept of Election

Election is a device for filling an office or post through choices made by a designated body of people called the electorate (Heywood, 1997). Elections are not just casting of votes to elect leaders, but also the active participation of the people in governance to ensure sustenance and survival of democracy. In this sense, it is not a ritual organized for people to queue up every four years to cast their votes but also a veritable process of changing leadership through peaceful means for improved socio-economic policies that benefit the people (LEMT, 2003). Ajayi (2005) maintains that election is a process through which suitable candidates are chosen for public offices through voting. It is a method of making choices by voting. He identifies two forms of election; direct and indirect election. Direct election is a method by which the electorates vote directly for candidates of their choice, while indirect election serves as a means by which representatives are indirectly elected through Electoral College.

According to Key (1960), election establishes a framework for change. It provides continuity and a sense of political community, for they are links in a chain that bind one generation of voters to the other. Every four years the voters come together in an act of decision that is influenced by the past and present, but designed to shape the future.

Lawal (2003) argues that election has become a necessity in liberal democracies. He describes election as basically a democratic method. However, he opines that not all elections are democratic, according to him, undemocratic elections are capable of causing electoral crisis and unstable democratic system. Flowing from the foregoing, elections are elections when they freely and fairly conducted. In any democratic arrangement, elections are supposed to be free and fair, it is free and fair when it is conducted under peaceful and orderly atmosphere. This kind of election legitimizes regime and consolidates democracy. The implication of this is that there cannot be true democracy as long as free and fair elections remain elusive. This is because election malpractices bring about election crises and democracy cannot thrive in an environment bedeviled with crises.

The Concept of Election Crises

Longman Dictionary of contemporary English defines crisis as a situation in which there are a lot of problems that must be dealt with quickly so that the situation does not get worse or more dangerous (Longman, 2003). Election crises can therefore be perceived as a situation in which there are a lot of problems emanating from the conduct of elections that must be dealt with quickly so that the situation does not lead to political and or democratic instability. These problems may come in form of election malpractice, intimidation of voters, attack of voters by party supporters, hijacking of ballot boxes, rigging of election results, ballot stuffing, e.t.c. All these problems are capable of causing election crises and crises emanating from elections are capable of truncating democracy.

The Concept of Democracy

Democracy may be described as a system of government under which the people exercise political power, either directly or through their representative periodically elected by themselves (Appadorai, 1975). Democracy ensures fundamental human rights, respect for the rule of law, equality of persons, popular participation, competition, multiparty system as well as the machinery for political and economic development of a society (Adeyemo, 2008).

There is a general but specialized tendency to see democracy only in terms of a land of government rather than the totality of social relations and a system of values. In this way, it is defined of government in class society representing, in reality or in fiction, the supremacy of many over the few through the mechanisms of state. This conception of democracy as a mode of rule narrowly distinguishes it from other types of government where small minorities dominate the majority. This is for example, the case of theocracy, where only the priest rule, monarch, where only royal family or dynasty rules, aristocracy, where only an elite usually of landed property rules, oligarchy, where a few families rule, and of course, military dictatorship, where an omnipotent command of the armed forces rules (Bako, 1997).

The essence and major objectives of democracy is the creation of good condition for individuals and groups to have their fullest freedom and right to develop their actual and potential capabilities to realize whatever their stated goals are.

Ajayi (1998) opines that any claim to democracy by any regime or state must essentially embrace popular participation, competitive choice, the enjoyment of civil and political liberties by the citizenry in real

terms, and the accountability of the leadership. The participatory opportunity offered the citizenry in the choice and selection through periodic elections of credible representatives confers inestimable avenue for psychological self-satisfaction and self-fulfillment. This is so as the electorate who participate in the electoral process that eventually leads to the enthronement of a government and the political leadership can therefore lay claim to the government as their rather than being an imposition. Consequently, the mandate to govern emanates from them, while at the same time, they act as legitimizers of the governmental system. The government is seen as legitimate and therefore not illegal.

Democracy is a vehicle of human development, and without it, there can be no development. The western world has developed to its present level not simply because of their superior capacity to develop science and technology, but their adoption of democracy. Our underdevelopment in Nigeria is largely a reflection of the denial of democracy in the country. For the Western world to achieve democracy in the form of a vibrant and dynamic capitalism, they had developed certain institutional mechanisms which include the competitive party system, impartial electoral system independent judiciary free press, free and peaceful elections e.t.c.

The Concept of Democratic Consolidation

A democracy is said to be consolidated when the people come to accept that a democratic regime is the most appropriate for the society, better than any other realistic alternative they can imagine (Diamond, 1999). According to Beethan (1999) believes that democracy can best be said to be consolidated when we have good reason to believe that it is capable of withstanding pressure or shock without abandoning the electoral process or the political freedom on which it depends including those of dissent and opposition.

The process of consolidation begins with the inauguration of a new regime after a free and fair electoral process (Oquaye, 2000). It is a longer and more difficult process than the transition itself. To scholars, it means an identifiable phase in the process of transition from authoritarian to democratic systems that are critical to the establishment of a stable, institutional and lasting democracy (Beetham, 1994, Diamond 1989). Holistically, democracy can be said to be consolidated when its probability of breakdown is very low or on the other way round, that is, its probability of survival is very high. In other words democratic consolidation reaches a closure when all relevant observers, including major political actors, the general public and the academic experts expect the democratic regime to last into a foreseeable future, thereby having the capacity to build dams against a reverse wave (Baker, 2000).

Democratic consolidation is meant to describe the challenge of making new democracies secure, of extending their life expectancy beyond the short-term, of making them immune against the threat of authoritarian repression (Beetham, 1994). The inference from Beetham's definition of democratic consolidation reveals the starting point of a regime to be consolidated. Any discussion about democratic consolidation presupposes that a democratic regime exists from the beginning to the end of the process. Democracy is therefore the indispensable starting point in the form of a consolidating democracy, and its hopeful outcome in form of a consolidated democracy. That is, democratic consolidation cannot set in before a democratic transition has been successfully completed.

Fundamentally, democracy is consolidated when a government that has itself been elected in a free and fair contest is defeated at a subsequent election and accepts the results. The point here is that, it is not winning elections that matters, but losing it and accepting the verdict, because this demonstrates that powerful players and their supporters are prepared to put respect into the rules of the game above the continuation of their power.

Theoretical Framework

This study is essentially the effect of election crises on democratic consolidation. It examines why and how election crises affect the growth and development of democracy. Based on this, the study will be situated within the ambit of two theories, the group theory and frustration aggression theory.

Group theory explains the importance of group in governmental process, and election process is also part of this governmental process. Election crises which is the major focus of this paper is being carried out by group(s) either political party(s) or supporters of such parties, party thugs, voters, politicians e.t.c. Essentially, election crises revolves around group(s). Frustration aggression theory tends to explain the reasons behind the aggressive nature of people in certain situation. In line with this paper, election crisis is a manifestation of people's aggression resulting from election fraud. Therefore, the two theories are capable of giving deeper and scientific understanding of this study.

Bentley (1975) in his analysis says it is the interest which leads to the organization of groups. This fundamental presupposition is that achievement could be made fast by combination of effort through the formation and existence of a group rather than individual and that, group behaviour can influence things such as policies or decision rather than individual. It is easier for group to catalyze action or spur people into action than individual. Election crises are an action that is mostly influenced and carried out by group(s). For instance, group of voters, party supporters, party thugs, party members e.t.c are all groups that are capable of

causing election crises. It is reasonable to note that election crises are mostly carried out to achieve some interests that are paramount to the groups or their sponsors.

Frustration aggression theory believes that the primary source of the human capacity for crisis of violence is the frustration aggression mechanisms. The anger induced by frustration is a motivating force that disposes men to aggression irrespective of its instrumentalities. If frustration is sufficiently prolonged or sharply felt, aggression is quickly likely to occur (Dugan, 2004). Men who are frustrated have an innate disposition to do violence or cause crisis to its source in proportion to the intensity of their frustration.

According to Gur (1970), the potential for collective violence varies strongly with the intensity and scope of relative deprivation. This relative deprivation (frustration) predicts collective crisis or violence by social groups. When people perceive that they are being prevented from achieving a goal, their frustration is likely to turn to aggression. The closer one gets a goal, the greater the excitement and expectation of the pleasure and vice versa. Unexpected occurrence of the frustration also increases the likelihood of aggression.

From the foregoing, it is understood that election crises do not just happen without any reasons leading to its occurrence. It manifests when group(s) is frustrated. The frustration may be in different forms, for instance, voters may be frustrated when their votes are stolen and or when they are prevented from voting for candidate of their choice in an election, or still, when their electoral rights are not respected by the appropriate authority. Political party may also be frustrated when mandate given to it by the electorate is stolen and or prevented from achieving its electoral goals e.t.c. This frustration easily leads to anger and tension, thereby leading to crisis. Most of the election crises that happened in Nigeria between 1960s and 2014 can be traced to the aforementioned reasons. This frameworks will therefore enhance scientific understanding and stand as operational tools to further explain the circumstances that surrounded election crises between 1999 and 2014 in Nigeria and its implication on democratic consolidation.

Election Crises in Nigeria: An Examination

Nigerian politics has since independence, been characterized by thuggery and crisis, since election has become the only means of assuming political power in a democracy, consequently, electoral politics in Nigeria manifest in acrimony, assault, assassination, intimidation, harassment, maiming and killings (Lawal, 2007).

Since independence, most of the general elections conducted so far in Nigeria, such as 1964/1965, 1979, 1983, 1993, 2007 and 2011 have been characterized by crises. Such crisis manifested in 1964/1965, which eventually led to the termination of the first republic. Also, in 1983, the crisis was so much especially in the South Western Nigeria (old Ondo and Oyo States) to the extent that the military had to intervene, and that also marked the end of the second republic (Arowolo and Lawal, 2009).

The trend of electoral crisis varies according to the government in power in 1993, the president, Aliyu Babangida conducted a free, fair and peaceful election, but due to sit-tight tendency of the military ruler, he annulled the election, which led to enormous outburst and violent protest by Nigerians. This culture of violence and crisis has not political behaviour, it has also been one of the country's political behaviour, it has also been one of the potent causes of political decadence and underdevelopment in Nigeria.

From 1999, with the passing of new federal constitution, Nigeria moved to civilian rule under democratic elections in 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011. However, all of these elections were damaged by widespread electoral crises. By many accounts, these elections were far from being free and fair. The various incidences of election crises witnessed in Nigeria were products of a political process, where candidates will always want to win, but not ready to accept defeat. Losers in an election who see themselves to have been thwarted from reaching an important goal to which they entitled, usually become frustrated and aggrieved at the winner and are ready to inflict injury on or death to persons and destruction to properties (Abegunde, 2007).

Both Nigeria's federal and state elections were marred by serious incidents of crises. The scale of the crises questioned the credibility of these elections. In 2003, at least one hundred people were killed and many injured during federal and state elections in Nigeria. In 2007, over 300 people were killed in the course of presidential and gubernatorial elections (Paul and Pedro, 2008). In July 1st, 2005, two persons were killed in Gombi Local Government Area of Adamawa State when supporters of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) clashed in the aftermath of a bye-election as a result of electoral manipulation leveled against the PDP by supporters of the ANPP. Also, in October 14th and 15th, 2005, two persons were killed in the wake of the PDP's Ward and Local Government Congresses in Edo-State. In 2007, there were various electoral crises across the nation, these include crisis in Ondo State as a result of protest by the people against the result of gubernatorial election, the same thing also happened in Ekiti State. The crisis in Oyo and Osun States was not different from that of Ondo and Ekiti States. In Sokoto State, there was crisis that emanated from disputed gubernatorial election result. In Kogi State, It was a theatre of war e.t.c. The 2011 general elections in Nigeria was not free from crisis. These strategies of causing electoral crisis are used predominantly by the incumbent party and are deployed most vigorously where the electoral contest is expected to be particularly tight. Although, electoral crises has not been the

extensive preserve of the ruling party. Candidates and supporters of the larger opposition parties also carry out the acts of violence in the pursuit of electoral victory. Furthermore, whenever crisis is instigated by supporters of one party whether ruling or the opposition their opponent usually don't hesitate to respond on land. (Lawal, 2014).

Election Crises and Democratic Consolidation: The Parallel Relationship

An election is one of the key pillars of democracy. It is the means of translating the critical element of equality of citizens in democratic societies into relating through 'one person, one vote', in the constitution of the elective offices of the state. However, this is so only, if elections are free, fair and credible (Alemika, 2011). Electoral crisis is the employment of force by political parties or their supporters to intimidate opponents protest against action contrary to electoral law and threat to a democratic regime and has often accounted for seizure of political power by the use of undemocratic means, while democratic consolidation is perceived to be a situation, which democracy has become irreversible, a situation, which political actors and citizens abide by the rules and norms of democratic procedures and only seek to resolve their differences by constitutional means. This aptly describes the ethos and values of democracy. Based on the foregoing, it is reasonable to note that electoral crisis and democratic consolidation are two parallel lines that cannot meet, they are contrapuntal to each other. Democracy as understood can only be consolidated in a peaceful political atmosphere devoid of rancor and crisis of any kind.

It is however unfortunate that the incessant crises and conflict in Nigeria politics are derived on the missing link between democratic consolidation and electoral processes, the electoral processes meant to complement democratic ethos in order to consolidate democracy have been essentially toyed with. The electoral processes have been subjected to various manipulations resulting to crisis such that the emerged leaders have failed to command the support, obedience and cooperation of the people. Such leaders cannot but pave way for electoral crises, which consequently obstruct democratic consolidation.

Democracy is all about people, the power of the people to determine whom their leaders will be lies with them. It is sacrosanct and can only be expressed in an atmosphere devoid of conflicts, threats and crises.

Causes of Election Crises in Nigeria

Winners take all syndrome: politicians and political parties go about their electioneering campaign in a way and manner that suggest that losing is an abomination (Lawal, 2010). This is more so because politicians that loose at the polls are usually shut out from power and influence by the party in power. This practice of politics of exclusion and its implications propel the resolve of politicians to employ and means to be victorious at the polls.

Sit tight syndrome: This has become a phenomenon in Nigerian politics. This is a situation in which an individual tries to hold on to power for personal aggrandizement or gains. In an attempt to hold on to power, leaders often create crises during election. They organize political thugs, hooligans to sing their praises, intimidate opponents and kill them if they become intransigent (Oyetope, 2003).

Poverty and unemployment: A vast majority of the populace is poor and unemployed, so, some of them cannot easily resist the temptation to engage in act that can cause crises for a fee.

Pre-bendal politics: In Nigeria, politics is conceived as an investment. The politicians having invested colossally on political activities coupled with the existing system of winner takes all would want to win at all cost. The need to cause crisis to rig or destabilize election becomes inevitable, especially when such politicians are not popular. Others are; refusal to accept electoral defeat in good faith, disenfranchisement inadequate, voting materials at poll, absence of issue-oriented electioneering campaigns, electoral fraud, such as rigging before, during and after voting (Lawal, 2007).

Effects of Election Crises on Democratic Consolidation

Election crises have been a cog in the wheel of democratic consolidation in Nigeria since 1999. Democracy would be meaningless and its consolidation will also be hampered if the individual did not have the right to choose among competing candidates for positions of government leadership. The manipulations and subsequent crises that bedeviled the 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011 elections are capable of truncating democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Election in this regard cannot guarantee support, acceptability and cooperation that are essential to elicit democratic consolidation.

Election crises retard political, economic and social growth and development. It causes insecurity of lives and properties, many people have died, while some have lost valuable properties in the course of election crises. Democracy, when consolidated guarantee security, but consolidation of democracy cannot thrive in violent environment. Election crisis is capable of creating conflict in the society among the people. It can cause inter-party conflict, inter-group conflict and intra-group conflict, it can lead to breakdown of law and order, which are capable of affecting the consolidation of democracy.

Election crises destroy democracy and its virtues, which has negative consequence on democratic consolidation. Democracy cannot thrive in crises let alone consolidating it in crises.

CONCLUSION

Efforts have been made in this paper to discuss election crises and democratic consolidation in Nigeria since 1999. It was evident that crises have enveloped our electoral processes since 1999, the elections conducted within these periods were marked with cases of electoral fraud and marred with cases of crises. Unfortunately, the hard earned democracy since 1999 had refused to be consolidated, rather it had been subjected to mockery and violence. The politicians who are in power have refused to understand the game of democracy as a winning and losing game. They manipulate election results at will, therefore, elections become subject of crises, which further inhibits democratic consolidation. It has been demonstrated in this study that well organized, credible and acceptable election results contribute significantly to democratic consolidation and its sustainability by building confidence and trust into the democratic process. Based on this, the paper makes the following suggestions.

The constitution should be amended and Electoral Act reviewed to make Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) truly independent and not a tool in the hands of the president. The electoral body must indeed be impartial in the conduct and organization of elections. This will engender the confidence of all parties in electoral competition.

The commission should also make adequate and timely provision of electoral materials needed for the conduct of elections so as to prevent eligible voters from disenfranchisement. There must be constant review of voters register to ensure that those who are qualified to vote are allowed to do so in order to avoid unnecessary crises during voting. The body must also make proper recruitment of the requisite caliber of electoral personnel with adequate training and timely orientation, as this in a way minimize incidences of partisanship and outright connivance of officials in the perpetration of electoral irregularities.

The Nigerian political class must also stop seeing winning an election as a matter of life and death, where the incumbent would use any means possible to ensure that he retains power, while the opponent would also use the same means to unseat the incumbent. Political education of the voters is very important for a sustainable democratic consolidation. INEC, National Orientation Agency (NOA) civil society organizations and other relevant agencies should step up public enlightenment on the evil of electoral crises and its effects on democracy.

Politicians should imbibe the spirit of tolerance, maturity and accommodation. There is need to embrace dialogue as a veritable tool for resolving conflict. Electoral defeat should be accepted without rancor and bitterness.

All perpetrators of electoral crises, regardless of their political affiliation must be punished to serve as deterrence to others.

Government should create employment opportunities so as to reduce the high level of poverty in Nigerian society.

Finally, since democracy is about ensuring good life and peaceful co-existence, there is need for us to embrace peace and reject crises during election so as to consolidate the hard earned democracy.

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