

Challenges of Electoral Processes in Nigeria's Quest for Democratic Governance in the Fourth Republic

Yusuf Isma'ila¹ Zaheruddin Othman²

College of Law, Government and International Studies, 06010 Sintok, Kedah, Universiti Utara, Malaysia

Abstract

Election as one of the most essential ingredients of democracy, its conduct has remained a challenge to democratic governance not only in Nigeria but also almost all over the world. Nigeria's electoral process has since the first one in 1922 during colonialism to the last in 2015 has been characterized with fraud such as imposition of candidates, rigging, stuffing ballots, violence etcetera. This paper reviews the features of what is and what is not democratic governance as well as election process. An attempt is also made to describe the dimensions as well as challenges of electoral malpractice in Nigeria's quest for democratic governance in the fourth republic. The paper argues violence, legitimacy crises, corruption and other vices cannot be unrelated with electoral fraud. It concludes by recommending and suggesting strategies that would tackle challenges of electoral process thereby having viable democratic governance in the country.

1. Introduction

Democratic governance is a process whereby democratic principles such as popular sovereignty, empowerment, political equality, majority rule, functional constitution, rule of law, independent judiciary, periodic free and fair election and human rights and freedom are enshrined in a polity. However in Nigerian context these principles are not waxing stronger if not functioning properly, especially principle of free and fair election which perhaps is one of the essential three. Election in a democracy is very important because it is medium through which that the expression of the people are shown via legitimacy and leadership succession. According to Dickerson, et al (1990) election is defined as a post mortem that investigate the record of office holders whose actual performance may have little to do with promises made when they were previously elected. However, the three general elections (2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015) conducted in Nigeria since the re-emergence of democracy in 1999, does not satisfy the quest for democratic governance in the country. Yet with exception of the outcome of 2015 election it is the same political party that has been ruling the country at the centre, thus credibility of those elections is put to question because of its characterized irregularities.

It is worthy to note that, the struggle for democracy in Nigeria was not conceived only as an end in itself to end the military rule or as an externally oriented initiative, but also as means for achieving responsible political institutions, which promote a government that is accountable to the people (Bello, 2011). Meanwhile democratic governance is not merely about election and the transfer of power to civilians but about the rule of law, respect for the constitution and for fundamental human rights, socio-economic empowerment and peace, security of lives and property etcetera. The situation in which Nigerian democracy has been in this era, in transforming political and socio-economic empowerment of its citizens still remain an illusion. It therefore raises fundamental questions such as: What is the meaning of democracy and which democracy? It is pertinent to ask these questions because when democratic government is fully in place, it is expected to create happiness for the large percentage of the population as against the happiness for the few 'transnationally oriented elite', within Nigeria. It is also expected to create equality, gradual and incremental socio-economic and political transformation and legitimately create an environment that will allow people at all level to exercise control and authority over political and economic activities that affects them.

Indeed the interest of this study lies in all of these features and even more, but specifically in the supremacy of the will of the electorate and regular free and fair elections because these are what Apam (2011) describes as the features of democratic state that ensure the responsibility and responsiveness of the elected leaders to the electorate, the hallmark of democracy no matter how it is defined. Ironically Nigeria's multi-party democracy has manifest it's in ability to conduct credible elections in 2003, 2007 and 2011. While elections and democracy are interwoven, they serve as foundations of democratic governance, expected to make government responsible and responsive. In spite the significance of credible elections to democratic governance, it is sad to observe that malpractice has been synonymous with elections in Nigeria. Elections have been characterized with fraudulent machinations which frustrate democratic aspirations of the people. Results of Nigeria's elections have often been associated with political tension, violence and crisis. Ibrahim (2007) has noted that outcomes of many elections in Africa have been so contested that the conditions for survival of the democratic ideals have been compromised thereby making the democratic feature bleak and not promising. The tragedy of the country's democratic experience since the re-emergence of civilian rule in 1999 has been according Imobighe (2013) bizarre manipulation of electoral process, whereby election riggers turn out to be the net beneficiaries of the electoral process, and this creates a lot of frustration in the electorate. For instance the political office holders

who bought their way to power, mainly use their time to accumulate more fund to again buy their way to power in the next election. They do not feel obliged to be accountable to the electorate. In the following discussion we shall grasp the challenges of democratic governance in Nigeria. While on one hand democratization era encouraged democratic governance on the other hand electoral process increases challenges and crisis of democratic governance in Nigeria during the fourth republic.

2. Conceptual Clarifications: Democracy, Democratization and Democratic Governance It is noteworthy to observe that both democratization and democratic governance originates from the concept of democracy. While the three concepts are interconnected, they are independently unique and distinct with different variables. For instance democracy is constitutional rule or government where people select amongst themselves representatives to discharge responsibilities concerning their welfarism and allocation of values and resources effectively. Democratization however is about movement or struggle by people to possess values of democracy, that is, to be able to work with the principles of democracy such as political parties, elections, constitutionalism, freedom and rights, etcetera in their system of politics or government. On the part of democratic governance thus, it is about functioning of those principles of democracy in a political system. It is therefore one thing to struggle or even have democracy, but it is entirely another different thing to have effective functioning of democratic processes or principles in a political system. Therefore in situation where institutions of democracy are vibrant and sustainable, democratic governance can be said to be in existence, however the absence of those characteristics can be considered as a doom for democratic governance.

It is also significant to note that like globalization, a comprehensive definition of the term democracy is conceptual as well as theoretical impossibility. Thus attempt by scholars and political theorists across age, discipline and society to defined democracy have always foundered on the rock of antiquity and antinomy. It has been noted that this profound epistemological impasse may be due to the fact that the concept of democracy itself is a process of perpetual becoming. The democratic ideal remain just that an ideal. Indeed the completely democratic society is a political and historical mirage (Williams, 1995:65).

Despite difficulties and compounded intellectual and ideological differences to bring about concise and precise definition of democracy, scholars and researchers have resorted to various device and stratagems for highlighting its often contradictory actualities. Perhaps following the lead of Robert Dahl (1971) in his seminal contribution, "Polyarchy" Diamond, et al have defined the term as a system of government which is characterized with three ingredients, which are as follows;

- 1- Meaningful and extensive competitions among individuals and groups (especially political parties) for all effective positions of government power, at regular intervals and excluding the use of force;
- 2- a highly inclusive level of civil and political participation in the selection of leaders and policies, at least through regular and fair election such that no major (adult) social group is excluded;
- 3- and a level of civil and political liberties freedom of expression freedom of press, freedom to form and join organizations sufficient to ensure the integrity of political competition and participation (Cited in Diamond, 1992: 14-15).

Thus, it is along the line of this definition that Diamond opined that global democratic revolution and the trend it has taken could be measured. A country can be measured or described as democratic if it combines most of the features mentioned or highlighted in the definition, especially – freedom of speech, freedom of association, the supremacy of the will of the electorate, regular elections, and accountability. A country is thus semi democratic if it combines some of these features and undemocratic if its polity is marked by singular absence of most or all of the features.

In the liberal perspective of democracy, Ojie (2006) describes democracy in the following words:

“The essential idea of democracy is that the people have the right to determine who governs them. In most cases they elect principle governing officials and hold them accountable for their action. Democracy also impose legal limit on the government's authority by guaranteeing certain rights and freedom to their citizens”. (Cited in Ebirim, 2014:3)

“Any regime where the consent of people is sought to be obtained without freedom of expression of divergent opinions, does not qualify for being called democracy even if it maintains certain democratic institutions” (ibid: 5).

Using quantitative method Potter, Goldblatt, Kiloh and Lewis (1997) observed that “Democratization” is the main global phenomenon in the twentieth century. It spreads with particular vigor since the 1970s; in 1975 at least 68 percent of countries throughout the world were authoritarian, all the rest having held some sort of political and civil rights. In their book “Democratization” potter et al, (1997) examines, “the word Democratization refers to political change moving in democratic direction” they explained why some political regimes move in a democratic direction than others? They further explained what is meant by “moving in democratic direction and how one identify actual political regimes throughout the world as a more or less

democratic”.

Potter et al’s formulation of democratization rests on a set of seven concepts grounded for the most part of David Held’s (1976) models of democracy and Robert Dahl’s (1989) democracy and its critics. They distinguish five main types of political regimes. They distinguished this typology regime to different attribute of state and civil society. The state is characterized by assembly of an institutional patterns and political organizations, coercive administrative, legal-distinguished from other organizations in society by having the capacity to monopolize the legitimate use of violence within a giving territory. Each state also aims to provide security from foreign intervention for people within its boundaries by conducting relations, both peaceful and war like, with other states. On the other hand, the concept of civil society is distinct from the state and can be said to name the space of unforced human association and also the set of relational networks-framed for the sake of family, faith, interest and ideology. Civil society can be harsh or sparse in terms of the number and vitality of association and relational networks within state boundaries. It is important not to see the state at totally ‘separate’ or impartial with respect to the association of everyday life (Potter 1997:3-4).

Understanding Democratization has been categorized into three phases: (i) the liberalisation phase, when the previous authoritarian regime opens up or crumbles; (ii) a transition phase, often culminating when the first competitive elections are held; and (iii) the consolidation phase, when democratic practices are expected to become more firmly established and accepted by most relevant actors (O’Donnell and Schmitter, 1986; Linz and Stepan, 1996 cited in Rakner, Melocal and Fritz, 2007:5). The last phase can be essential considered as function of democratic principles which yields good democratic governance.

On the part of democratic governance to begin with, Governance as a concept has increasingly attracted international attention. The World Bank defines governance as the “manner in which power is exercised in the management of country’s economic and social resources for development” (World Bank, 2005). It relates to the processes of granting public power and the use to which such power is put, which ideally, should be for the service of the people (Imobighe, et al, 2013:244). In other words it is a reciprocal processes, in the sense that people conferred power to their representatives (managers of state power) with expectations and aspirations to “formulate and implement sound policies that will promote the corporate interest of the entire people”. Meanwhile, on one hand if the government fails to conduct this obligation, then its purpose will be considered defeated, thus issues of bad governance arises. On the other hand Elaigwu (2014:244) said “good governance deals with how those who have the authority of the state make efforts to achieve the goals or the ends of the state—the maintenance of law and order, the provision of welfare for its citizens and the pursuits of national interest in the global arena”.

Democratic governance therefore is a broad phenomenon that recognizes the interconnection of issues of democracy and governance. It is useful concept that touches on the significant challenges of state reform and the quest for development and progress of the people of a state. Despite this connection, democracy and governance are conceptually distinct phenomena with different theoretical and philosophical underpinnings. This is according to Ibeanu and Egwu (2007), not simply because the concept of governance gained a recent entry into political discourses and was popularized by the World Bank’s intervention in the debate on the African crisis in the 1980s, whereas the idea of democracy had existed since the Greek city state of Athens and came to be popularized subsequently by theory of representative democracy. They further explained that the formal, institutional and procedural elements of democracy can exist without effective governance in the sense that it does not necessarily guarantee that public officials produced by electoral process will be subjected to the norms of transparency, accountability and the rule of law. The experience of Nigeria during the intermittent periods of civilian administrations seems to support this view. Contra wise, the experience of the Asian Tigers seems to suggest, it is possible to have good governance that can advance development without democracy.

According to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE, 2011), “Democratic governance is a system of government where institution function according to democratic process and norms, both internally and in their interaction with other institutions”. The United Nations Missions (UNMIT, 2005) stated that:

The culture of democratic governance moves beyond the mere procedures of democracy and the establishment of democratic institutions. A state which identifies with the culture of democratic government is one which welcomes a wide scope of political participation embracing a pluralistic system of political parties, a vibrant civil society and media, integrating women and minorities in all levels of government, protecting right and dignity of children and involves integrated approach to sustainable governance for and by all the people (UNMIT, 2005).

In a much discussed quantitative analysis Ibeanu and Egwu, (ibid: 19), measured “democratic governance in practice, is not only expected to promote the core values of democracy , it is also about deepening democracy in such a way that state institutions and political parties are accountable to the citizens”.

3. Electoral Process

In the form of interpretation of qualitative secondary data, numerous scholars contribute to the literature of elections, its process and malpractice (Ebirim, 2013; Ighodalo, 2012; Osinakachukwu and Jawan 2010; Idowu, 2010 and Herreros, 2006). Ighodalo, (2012) said “Elections are means of selecting representative of the people in different public positions within the polity”. He noted that Elections are critical aspects for democratic governance of modern political societies. They are considered as apparatus for political choice, mobilization and accountability. In the liberal democratic paradigm that has become the most popular form of democracy in today’s globalization era, elections are expected to cushion transition from one civilian regime to another and ease in legitimizing sitting governments. Odusote (2014:31) has rightly posited that electoral process is a pillar of democracy because it gives effect to the right to govern by consent,

Herreros (2006) sees election as a way of selecting ‘good types’ of politicians who would pursue the common good instead of their factional interests. Dickerson (et al, 1990) defines election as a post mortem of the record of those in office, whose performance may have little to do with promises made when they were last elected” (cited in Idowu, 2010:54). He further stated that election is often confused as electoral process. Thus he refers to electoral process as all the pre and post-election activities without which an election is either impossible or meaningless. The process therefore involves registration of political parties, voter’s registration, resolution of election disputes, swearing of election winners’ etcetera. Meanwhile, electoral process is certainly about rules and procedures of conducting an election.

Election therefore facilitates and shapes democracy. While democracy is considered as the best form of government due to its ideology of promoting peoples’ will. It is the people’s mandate to choose who should govern them in a free and fair ‘electioneering’. Therefore, election process constitute an essential principle in liberal democracy. Election is highly significant in a democracy because it is a medium through which the people express their legitimacy and leadership succession. As Jibrin (2009:33) writes “elections have meaning for most people only in a democratic context because they lead to the choice of decision makers by the majority of the citizens. Elections and democracy are therefore inextricably linked”. Osinakachukwu and Jawan (2010:130) said it is a process of checkmating a ruler that is popularly accepted and ejecting an unpopular leader, mainly through voting. “This method shuns mutiny and chaos in a system hence it reflects peaceful hand-over from one administration to the other so long as the process is devoid of election rigging”. It has been noted that for elections to thrive there should be the establishment of a well-defined, competent, relatively independent and non-partisan electoral body that will be responsible for the conduct of elections. There is need for the existence of impartial judiciary that will interpret electoral laws and as well as adjudicate on electoral matters. Mass media devoid of influence from the politicians should be instituted together with police force that will help supervise the conduct of an election. Indeed one of the major element of electoral process is to ensure an election is free and fair and the result of the election must reflect the wishes of the people. Therefore any activity that hampers the conduct of an election can be considered as ‘subversion of people’s sovereignty’. Using theoretical framework of cultural relativism Idike, (2014) critically examine the problems and prospects of e-voting on Democracy and electoral process in Nigeria. He refers to electoral process as a complex process that encompasses the good intentions and undesirable outcomes of election administration, particularly in emerging democracies where general elections are often marred by culturally hued electoral malpractices. In the Nigerian case, the truth remains that the electoral process is immensely characterized by a culture of electoral malpractices.

In a democratic system where elections are devoid of crisis, long term disputes or political violence, are amicably resolved. Such system enhances the prospect for political stability, peace, development and continuity in governance. However where elections are synonymous with violence, thuggery, intimidation, rigging, ballot box snatching and stuffing and other forms of electoral malpractices, they bring to question the very essence of democracy and compromise the nation’s security.

4. Electoral Malpractice

Ebirim (2013) sees electoral malpractice as a process by which the rule and regulations that govern the conduct of election are manipulated to favour specific interests. It is achievable through numerous tactics and strategies including outright rigging and falsification of electoral result. However, electoral malpractice can take place before, after and during election. In the same vein, Bamisaye & Awofeso (2011) defines electoral malpractices as the reflect determination of politicians, political actors and political parties to capture power by all means and at all cost. For him, politicians involve all sorts of electoral malpractices such as rigging of elections and the intimidation of voters in order to subvert the electoral process. Election rigging according to Nwabueze (2005 cited in Ibrahim, 2009) refers to electoral manipulations which are palpable illegalities committed with a corrupt, fraudulent or sinister motive to influence an election in favour of a candidate (s) by way such as illegal voting, bribery, treating and undue influence, intimidation and other form of force exerted on the electorates, falsification of results, fraudulent announcement of a losing candidate as the winner (without altering the recorded results). Electoral malpractice has become an increasing problem in incipient democracies that

emerged as a result of the so - called “Third Wave” of democratization that swept across the developing world from the 1980s onwards (Menocal, 2003).

5. Dimensions of the Challenges of Electoral Malpractice in Nigeria

In Nigeria as elsewhere in Africa, one of the objectives of the transition to democracy has been a free and fair electoral system, the hallmark of liberal democracy. According to the International Institute of Democratic and Electoral Assistance (IDEA, 2001) by definition, liberal democracy is a procedural system involving open political competition, with multi party, civil and political rights guaranteed by law and accountability operating through an electoral relationship between citizens and their representatives. However, the citizens of Nigeria have clearly been denied a true experience of liberal democracy according to this definition.

According to IDEA (2001), important institutional factors that are major impediment to the electoral process in Nigeria include the limited autonomy of various electoral bodies (particularly their lack of financial empowerment) and their weak human resource base. Unreliable voters register combined with serious logistic and communication problems are characteristics of the flawed electoral process. Psycho cultural factor primarily derived from the history of today’s immense political corruption, factors that have undermined the social and economic basis for the emergence and sustenance of democratic political culture in Nigeria. These political factors are set against the background of a major structural factor institutionalized.

Among the most serious and blatant cases of electoral fraud are;

- i. Rigging, overstuffing of ballot boxes, over bloating ballot register, special treatment of voters and election officials, disappearance or destruction of ballot box etc.
- ii. Distortion or doctoring of results.
- iii. Annulment and falsification of election result

Despite the serious nature of the above irregularities in the electoral process, the April 2003, “election forgery” and the 2007 “falsification of election results” as well as 2011 “electoral flaws” in the presidential, gubernatorial and the Assemblies elections have seriously undermined the country’s democratization processes. These acts, a master stroke against democracy and the democratization process, have posed threats to the country’s corporate existence. Other factors that are consistently cited as undermining competitive electoral politics in Nigeria include;

1. Lack of discipline in the forms, spirit and implementation of the election process.
2. Excessive monetization of politics in general.
3. A “winner takes all” philosophy pervasive among the political elites;
4. The general level of poverty and illiteracy.
5. The absence of clear ideological underpinning of the parties.
6. Religious bigotry and to a limited extent ethnic chauvinism
7. Political corruption

Election rigging was perfected in the elections conducted in 1964, 1965, 1979, 1983, 1999, 2003 and 2007. Election rigging connotes any form of undue authority or power that influence and manipulate election result in a dubious way to protect a particular interest against the interest of the generality of the masses. When the interest of the people are articulated in a free and fair election, the government in power tend to enjoy the sovereign legitimacy of the people but election rigging can thwart the interest of the people hence the dubious imposition of an unpopular candidate. The sad end is governments’ lack of people’s support which is one of the basic principles of democracy.

6. Challenges and Consequences of Electoral Malpractice to Democratic Governance in Nigeria

Manipulation of election proceedings (such as in voters’ registration), rigging, thuggery, nullification and outright falsification of election results as well as Cynicism are the most crisply analysed variables in the scope and aspects of electoral malpractice and violence in Nigeria. Other challenges to the electioneering and democratic governance include imposition of unpopular candidates through impunity, excessive monetization, corruption and weak democratic institutions. Thus consequences of these challenges are disenfranchisement of voters, apathy and legitimacy crisis as well as insincerity, bad leadership and autocracy. Indeed these consequences would definitely have spill over effect on security and economic situation sinking people deeper into poverty.

It is however pertinent to note before the fourth republic Nigeria has been democratizing through a series of transition to civil rule organized and implemented by non-democratic regimes. The first transition (1954-1960), which gave birth to the first republic (1960-1966), was organized by the British regime (Mackintosh, 1966, Post and Vickers, 1973 Post 1960) while the subsequent ones which led to the second, third and now fourth republics were carried out by the military regimes (Kurfi, 1983, Oyediran, 1981, Ujo, 2000a and 2000b; cited in Bako, 2001; 3). Nevertheless, the 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015 elections were organized and implemented by civilian democratic regimes.

To understand the challenges and consequences of electoral malpractice, there is need to review the violent reaction of the electorate after election malpractices. We need to therefore examine the trend of events and issues of political violence and electoral malpractices that have taken place in Nigeria's political history. Odama (2010:1) noted that the history of elections via political violence and electoral malpractices in Nigeria can be examined in four phases; elections during the colonial period, elections in the first years of independence 1960 - 1965, elections during military rule and autocracy, and elections under civilian regimes in between the military rule and autocracy and today's civilian fourth republic. He observed that the background of electoral malpractice and violence in Nigeria dates to period before 1960. He stated that when the British colonial masters conducted the first election, the legislative council's election in Lagos and Calabar from 1922 that culminated in the 1958/59: there was documented evidence that the British took decisive measures to rig each set of elections that they presided over.

Any serious description of the challenges of democratic government, electoral malpractice and violence in Nigeria should consequently mention albeit briefly the attendance effect of spilled over from colonialism to successive elections conducted after the colonial era in Nigeria. The problem intensified with the 1964 General elections. Despite an all-party consensus to ensure a free and fair election at a meeting called by the then Prime Minister, all agreements reached were widely breached. Specifically the agreements to lift bans on public meetings were breached, permits for rallies in the North were denied and mass arrests of their candidates and polling agents in the North. On account of these arbitrary abductions, arrests, detention, intimidation of its candidates, copious evidence of which was submitted to the President, United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) demanded the postponement of the elections, the government refused and UPGA boycotted the elections. Despite the boycott, elections purportedly went on in Northern and Western Nigeria and the federal territory, Lagos, where the governments were in control. The boycott was effective in the National Convention of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) controlled areas - the East and the Midwest. On account of the boycott, the Nigeria National Democratic Party (NNDP) despite its clear unpopularity, as evidenced by the absurdly low votes it received even without opposition, claimed victory in the West. In the aftermath of this travesty, the Western Region became engulfed in possibly the bloodiest civil resistance to the government and its sympathizers that the country had ever seen which led to military took over in 1966. Ademoyega (1981:19) opined that: "The elections of December 1964 turned out to be a farce. It was completely boycotted in the Eastern Region, where the NCNC Government used its power to ensure that no election was held. It was also partly boycotted in the west, North, Mid-West and Lagos, with the effect that the election results lacked credit and were nationally unacceptable. However, while the UPGA rejected them, the Northern People's Congress (NPC) and its allies of the NNA, which single handedly carried out the elections, accepted them thereby culminating in a national stalemate" (cited in Osinbajo, 2008).

Three elections conducted during the period of military rule were the elections of 1979, under the first coming of General Obasanjo, the 1992 - 1993 elections under General Babangida and the 1999 elections under General Abdul salami Abubakar. Each of these elections was equally controversial. The 1979 elections came up with the so called twelve -two-thirds controversy that was resolved summarily by the military. The elections of 1992-1993 were frequently delayed, cancelled, postponed and adjusted to produce a result predetermined by the military. The results of the June 12, 1993 were not only criminally and brazenly annulled on the excuse that the military was uncomfortable with them. Either by an act or by design the Association for Better Nigerians filed a case in a Law Suit and obtained an injunction against the election result, while the Association campaigned for the continuation of the military regime. The cancellation of the results of the 1993 general elections aggravated inter-ethnic tension and hostility, which eventually culminated in the demise of the third attempt at instituting enduring democracy in Nigeria. The 1999 elections occurred with flawed electoral rules, without a legitimate and valid constitution, and with the electoral agencies under the firm control of military rulers. Thus it is widely suspected that the results were predetermined.

From 1983 onwards, five sets of elections conducted under the civilian regimes were the general elections of 1983 under the Shehu Shagari's National Party of Nigeria (NPN) government. There were also general elections of 2003 and 2007 under Olusegun Obasanjo as well as the 2011 and 2015 general elections of the Jonathan administration, all by Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). The 1983 election was known to "have been bastardized by the misuse of the power of incumbency, money and politics of bitterness and intolerance inherited from the first republic" (Ogbeidi: 2010:48). In the 1983 elections, the ruling NPN government perpetrated all sorts of electoral atrocities. The voting process, voter registration, and actual votes cast were all grossly distorted. To produce the so-called 'landslide' and 'bandwagon effect', the order of elections was reversed and voters register inflated that the presidential elections be held last, the NPN government decided that these elections would come first. Onike (2009), assessed that the "2003 general elections dismayed and scandalized the ruling party's open and brazen resort to manipulation and forgery of election". Indeed, the 2007 elections were characterized by rigging, ballot snatching at gun points, criminal manipulation of voters' list and brazen falsification of election results. The 2007 election was indeed a product of do or die affair, the outcome of which

is the abolition of the Nigeria electorate and it was a case of raped electoral process. According to Williams (The Nation, Oct. 8 2009, pages 41 and 42), the 2007 elections have been adjudged as the worst in the history of the nation and arguably mankind since the advent of liberal democracy. Never in the history of the nation has an election brought so much pains and misery to the people. In fact, the conduct of the 2007 general elections was remarked by head of the Election Observation Mission (EOM), the European Union (EU), which the election is “far short of basic international and regional standards for democratic elections.” According to the EOM, the 2007 elections “were marred by very poor organization, lack of essential transparency, widespread procedural irregularities, substantial evidence of fraud, widespread voter disenfranchisement at different stages of the process, lack of equal conditions for political parties and candidates and numerous incidents of violence....”(Cited in National Daily; June, 2010).

The survey of disputed elections in Nigeria should reflect the 1999, 2003 and 2007 election reports that showed a consistent and continued pattern of political violence that included the killing of candidates, intimidation of voters and harassment of politicians. Security officers and the police in particular, were widely criticized by national stakeholders and international observers alike for their failure to protect voters, abuses of their human rights, failure to uphold the law and in some case their direct complicity in election disruption, violence, vote rigging, intimidation and ballot box theft. In the case of 2011 Presidential election, although has been commended by EOM as one of the most successful in Nigeria’s political history, cases of stuffing ballot boxes, under age voting and outright falsification of election results have been reported in some states. In fact, with regard to post election violence the Leadership Newspaper, Wednesday, April 20, 2011) had: On its front page, “Post-election violence” – “121 dead”: “Kaduna 50, Kano 30, Bauchi 16, Katsina 8, Gombe 17” and Displaced “15,000”. The story continued on its page 2, “Post-election Riots: 70 corps Members Escape Death in Minna”. Those involved were all National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) members. Still on the same page, “Election Violence: IG Orders State Commissioners on Red-Alert”. And, “Post-election crisis: FG Sends Reinforcement to Kaduna”. (Cited in Omotayo; 2011:1).

As can be seen from this survey of elections under colonial, civilian and military regimes in Nigeria, all elections share a number of common characteristics and trend. First, they have been particularly characterized by massive frauds, intimidation and even assassination of political opponents, the brazen subversion of the 'sovereignty of the vote' and controversy. The governments in power and politicians have their own designs and have generally perpetrated and maintained a culture of electoral violence and warfare. No election has been conducted without a great deal of controversy either before, during or after elections.

Secondly, while there has been continuity in violence and warfare, there has been lack of continuity in the political organizations through which both violence and warfare have been conducted. Each period has thus, produced new political formations reflecting not only the penchant for lack of principle and shifting allegiance among members of the political class but also the total de-ideologization of the issues on which members of the class were divided into antagonistic camps. For example, the major political parties in the 1951 - 1966 periods were the NPC, the NCNC and the AG, because by 1979 and 1983, the major political parties in the field became the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), Nigeria’s Peoples Party (NPP) and Great Nigeria’s People Party (GNPP). Between 1987 and 1993, the members of the political class were herded into the National Republican Convention (NRC) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP). During Abacha's ill-fated self-succession bid, the two herds metamorphosed into the famous 'five leprous fingers' on the same 'leprous hand'. Between 1999 and 2003, the five 'leprous fingers' changed into three main political parties: Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Alliance for Democracy (AD) and All Nigeria People Party (ANPP); by 2003-2007 further metamorphoses occurred with the appearance of Action Congress for Democracy (ACD), Action Congress (AC) and others on the scene. The appearance of Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) and Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) in 2011, more so the alliance of All Peoples Congress (APC) and Action Congress (AC) in 2015 also reflects this trend of de-ideologization and antagonistic camps. It is certainly imperative to emphasize that electoral malpractices are usually committed by the politicians with connivance of the National electoral body and the security agencies. These collaborators often supported manipulation of election results for selfish interest. The election riggers in perpetrating the offence of election malpractices induce voters, stuff the ballot boxes, and manipulate the election results, engaging in multiple counting of votes and outright falsification of the election results.

7. Revisiting the challenges of Electoral process in the fourth republic

Although existence of competitive and vibrant political parties in any polity is a sine a sine qua non for democratic governance in the fourth republic era; the role of People’s Democratic Party (PDP) which has been the ruling party at Federal level since the beginning of the fourth republic until 2015 indicates direct relationship between personality and the conduct of the country’s political party. As Dode (2010:1) has rightly argued that the Democratic experiment of the fourth republic in Nigeria” has not scored high when placed in the same matrix with countries that are heading towards stable democracy”. He noted that while opposition political parties are

expected to serve as alternative purpose where the electorate should freely choose at their wish, in Nigeria “they have been strategically weakened through the overt and covert strategies of the ruling PDP and the lack of total commitment on the part of the politicians to national course”. He further avers that Nigerian political parties have today failed to deliver toward good democratic governance in terms of representation of their people, aggregating social interests as well as serving as intermediaries between state and society. This is not only because over 90% of the political parties lack credible ideology and manifestoes but also “they are fragile, they have only developed shallow roots in the society”. Perhaps godfatherism and imposition of unpopular candidate in political parties poses serious challenges to party politics and electioneering in particular. This has been most political parties, certainly PDP in 2007 and 2015 presidential elections imposes Yar’adua and Jonathan respectively against the wishes of the party members, probably is one of the reasons that lead to the loss of presidency in 2015.

Perhaps the culture of corruption is basically the greatest challenge Nigeria is facing, it is the shortcoming of Nigeria’s polity (Olofin, 2001; Yusuf, 2001). Fundamentally, Nigeria’s political culture is embellished in political corruption which manifest itself in the use of and negative influence of money in politics, election rigging and thuggery. The major form of corruption that has remained obstacle to Nigeria’s national progress is the ‘political corruption’. As Apam (2011:24) succinctly puts it, the way of doing politics in this context, is not to live for it but to live from it. Politicians assume the role of political entrepreneurs who invest heavily in politics with the aim of claiming super profits and dividends in the ruthless appropriation of state resources. Obuah, (2010) found that 20 percent of Nigeria’s Gross Domestic Product goes to corrupt practices.

Certainly the issue of corruption scandals in the executive arm of the government or in the Parliament to support or block a motion in its plenary sessions, irrespective of the importance of that motion to ordinary Nigerians have become part and parcel of governance in Nigeria. Predominantly using secondary data Ogbonnaya, et al (2012:690) assessed that the legacy of erosion of the culture of rule of law and subsequent enthronement of the culture of arbitrariness and impunity which result to high level corruption has fundamentally impacted on power relations and democratic institutions such as the political parties, the Executive, Judiciary and Legislature as well as other agencies like Election commission. “The consequence of this has been the existence of subdued judiciary, weak oversight capacity of the legislature and dumbness of the electoral bodies both at the federal and state levels”.

Among the most important principles of democratic governance is the principle of participation, which is however missing in Nigerian context. While Muhammad (2014:38-9) suggests the concept of participation as collective engagement of human resources in the process of national development, he also noted that popular participation is the conscious and predetermined involvement of society in the process of governance and development. Therefore the major goal of democratic government is the provision of maximum participation through responsive and responsible government in its liberal tradition of periodic election, active involvement of civil society in decision making, development of competitive political parties and the flourishing of the rule of law. However, in the Nigerian context issues of participation have not been given appropriate concern. For instance the electoral act or constitution of should consider the participation of prisoners that are awaiting trial as well as Nigerians residing outside the country to vote in an election at the embassy of Nigeria of where they are residing.

Another daunting challenge of electoral process in the fourth republic is the delay in electoral justice. For example it took two years to adjudicate election petition filed by General Muhammadu Buhari against Chief Olusegun Obasanjo’s re-election in 2003. More so, there were alleged manipulation of court judgement in many of election Tribunals in Nigeria. Indeed, the view “that the history of election administration in Nigeria is the history of electoral fraud and violence” (Ajayi, 2007) is widespread. In fact once a candidate has the money to give out to the handlers of relevant election, his name will be announce as the winner of that election. Meanwhile, this give out money usually come out from the state treasury, because if any person that has been sworn into an office while the case of his election is still hanging in the court, he can hire the best lawyers to manipulate the process in order to delay the process, especially when it is clear the outcome will not be in his favour. For instance the case of Edo and Adamawa states in 2007 governorship elections.

Since the beginning of the fourth republic there has widespread allegation of rigging, violence and other election related offences either by politicians, thugs, security personnel and electoral officers without taking necessary action on them. Thus this phenomenon of not prosecution of election related offences in this fourth republic has been undermining not only the electoral processes but also democratic governance in general.

It is imperative to note since the beginning of the fourth republic from 1999 it was the 2015 general elections recognized as the least characterize with malpractice. The introduction of card reader has been associated with this success. However since the 2011 elections the chairman of the Independent Electoral Commission had demonstrate his impartiality, again by 2015 another record success was achieved due largely to his transparency as well as introduction of card reader in order to block traditional ways manipulating election results.

8. Conclusion

The use of election Card Reader in 2015 elections has made it a success that it stands us out today. It made sure only registered voters who had cards voted. It made it difficult for anybody to forge card and use it in the electoral process. Although there lapses along the line, it has added tremendous integrity in the 2015 general elections. All traditional ways of rigging have been totally blocked. We believe the card reader has come to stay, but there need to improve the technology of using it.

If the current government under President Muhammadu Buhari continue to address the menace of corruption and other challenges of Nigerian society things are likely to change for the better. The new president as former governor, minister of petroleum and head of state during the military era has the reputation of incorruptible character and does not tolerate corruption and mismanagement. In fact because of the fear of his intolerance to corruption some of the former top government officials have begun to return what they have looted from the immediate past regime. Therefore if politicians would act as president Buhari is doing, not only electoral process or democratic governance will go well but all other sectors of the country will be wearing a new look. Because it is corruption that drives imposition of political candidates through godfatherism, stuffing of ballots, thuggery, delay and manipulations of election justice and non-prosecution of electoral offenders. Certainly corruption is the workshop of almost the whole ills of the challenges of electoral process in democratic governance irrespective of political, economic, religious or social institutions the evils are manifesting. Although corruption has been part of every society even in developed countries but history has it that any country with record of development must have drastically curve the rate of corruption. Nigeria should take example from these countries.

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