

Elections and Nigeria's International Image: A Study of 2015 General Elections

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Abstract

Election is a very important component of a democratic process in any country because, it is a formal decision-making process by which a population chooses an individual to hold public office, and hence all the other variables of democracy revolve around elections. Elections represent a medium through a country can project its international image either positively or negatively through several means, particularly the electoral processes. This paper examined the influenced of 2015 general elections on Nigeria's international image. The paper is essentially qualitative in its approach and documentary sources were the major instruments used for data collection. The paper found that what made the 2015 Nigeria's general election credible was proper conduct of the election and general acceptability of the candidates competing for different political post. The paper argues that series of elections have been conducted in Nigeria; but the 2015 general elections actually determine the stand of Nigeria is the global support for democracy. The election not only received global commendations but also placed Nigeria as leading role of African democratic trends which many learn lesson from it their future conducts of elections. The paper concludes that violence is the greatest enemy of democracy, being the bane of Nigeria's march to democracy. This is because there can be no democratic elections, democratization, consolidation of democracy, growth in democratic culture or internalization of best democratic practices in any country if electoral violence is prevalent. The paper recommends among others that there is need for Nigerian state to build on the existing institutions that would ensure credible elections so that future elections would be more violent-free than the recent elections.

Keywords: Election, International Image, Electoral Violence and Politics in Nigeria.

Introduction

Election is a very important component of a democratic process in any country because, it is a formal decision-making process by which a population chooses an individual to hold public office, and hence all the other variables of democracy revolve around elections (Alabi, 2006). It is the cornerstone of democracy; it allows a viable and peaceful change of sort without acrimony or violence. Malloch (2003) further contends that, elections offer a unique opportunity to create a legitimate government and governance in the system. Elections, according to Teshome (2008), serve three main purposes in a democratic society. Firstly, elections serve as a means for people to choose their representatives; secondly elections are a means of choosing governments; and thirdly elections give legitimacy to the political system. One of the benchmarks for gaining international acceptability through a good international image is good governance, a process which often begins with the leadership through a transparent electoral process.

Election can further democracy, development, human rights and security or undermine them. Thus, promoting the integrity of election is critically important to nations that go for international recognition among comity of nations. In his view, Soremekun (2000) agrees that, to very a large extent election and electoral practices shape the fate of nations in the international system. Elections represent a medium through a country can project its international image either positively or negatively through several means, particularly the electoral process. Alechenu (2011) contends that the perception of a country's abroad is shaped by a number of factors, prominent among them is the domestic politics and its international policy as it affects the country's conduct in the committee of nations. Elections no doubt can impact positively or negatively on a nation's international image, Nigeria is no exception.

Again, images of nations, however right or wrong they may be, seems to be form among other things, fundamentally, through its domestic politics and the conduct and activities that is inherent and peculiar to that nation, it this domestic politics that is projected into the international arena as that nation's international image. Therefore a nation's international image is in fact the aggregation and the sum total of its domestic politics which is a function of internal and external diversities, interests and power play demonstrated through domestic politics.

Soremekun (2011), stresses that international politics is simply a projection of the internal politics of state which is the pursuits of power and interest of different groups and individuals in the society. The perception and the impression that is created from the general conduct and activities in the internal affairs and domestic politics of a nation is what is extended as the international image of that country in the international community. Hence Nigeria is no exceptions, the conduct of its elections, especially following the return of democracy in 1999

determines its place in the international system.

For instance, over the years in the country's political history, Nigeria juggled between a good image at certain periods (Example, between 1960-1967, 1970-1983, 1999-2007) and a bad image at other periods (1993-1999, 2007), (see Saliu, 2002; Egwemi, 1998, 2003, 2007; Egwemi and Usman, 2007). During periods of negative external image, the various governments have responded through different programmes and policies aimed at turning around and improving the negative image.

Although one could argue here that there is a problem of incomplete evaluation of elections and democracy in Nigeria. It is a truism that the popularity of democratic governance is rising across the world. Nigeria's democracy has been hailed by scholars, practitioners, and the international community in recent time (especially the 2015 elections) as a shining example in the West African sub-region as a result of the country's record of organizing successive elections with minimal or no violence.

However, the evaluation of Nigeria's democracy has predominantly focused on the nation's elections, political parties, democratization and disproportionately captured the role of elections in portraying the country's international image. In the rare instances where scholars have evaluated Nigeria's democracy beyond elections, the emphasis has been on political institutions and the electoral commission; conspicuously missing perception of other nations towards Nigeria in the conduct of its elections. This presents only a partial and an incomplete picture of Nigeria's democracy, given the relevance of citizen's participation in elections for democratic societies. It is therefore important investigate the role of elections in maintaining Nigeria's International image among the comity of nations. Therefore, this paper is to examine the influenced of 2015 general elections on Nigeria's international image.

Conceptual Clarifications and Literature Review

Concept of Election

Like every other concepts in social sciences, election mean different things to different people. It is a concept that attracts different opinions from scholars and practitioners. Theoretically, the concept of election attracts the interest of sociologists, geographers, economists and psychologists, among others, and is one of the major sub-fields of political science. In part, this wide interest is explained by the fact that elections are a central element in theories of democracy. Different versions of democratic theory vary in the precise importance they attach to elections, and they assign them various functions, but all agree that the open, competitive election of the national government is a fundamental and distinguishing characteristic of states that would normally be described as democratic. It is through elections that citizens participate directly in the political process and are able to hold governments accountable (David, 1992). National elections are major events in the life of a nation. They are accompanied by greatly increased discussion of, and interest in, politics on the part of the population as a whole, by intense political activity and by massive coverage in the mass media.

Conceptually, election is the formal process of selecting a person for public office or accepting or registering a political proposition by voting. Election is one of the means by which a society may organize itself and make specified formal decisions. Election, as the central component and the minimum necessary requirement for representative democracy, remains the only legitimate instrument for leadership turnover. It is a core aspect that requires the active involvement of citizen. Election is defined by Abdul (2009) as "an instrument through, which the electors exercise influence over public policies and repudiate those persons and policies electoral majorities no longer support". Election is means to choose those who will guide and direct the affairs of the government. Within these definitions, Heywood (1997) puts that "elections helps directly or indirectly to determine who will hold government power".

In the light of these definitions, elections play a significant role as a means to pursue or retain political power. Thus, it provides avenues for rectification and renewal in the political leadership of the country and guarantees the sovereignty of the people. In this way, an election becomes a principal means through which leaders and their political loyalties seek legitimacy. It also gives government prominence to endure its stability and continuity because they periodically engage citizens to endorse them.

Election is one of the central elements which place the steering wheel in the hands of the people to elect or renew those leaders in power to form government to which they offer legitimacy. This has compelled both democratic and authoritarian regimes to consider elections as a crucial practice to legitimize them or their policies (Abdul, 2009). Election means recruitment of representatives by the choice of the voters (Johari, 2010). Commenting on elections, Joseph (2009) argued that election is a periodical process by which candidates seek political power using the platform of political parties. He goes on to emphasize that the struggle to achieve political power is usually demanding, with the parties and candidates, alike putting all resources to work with the purpose of getting their desires realized.

Elections lie at the heart of representative governance giving meaning to the modern conception of democracy (Joseph, 1987). Elections are the process of choosing people for particular jobs by voting (Ojo, 2007). Olaitan (2005) sees election as the only acceptable institutionalized process enabling some or all of the recognized

members of a democratic society to choose office holders. They not only constitute the mirror of people's understanding and the level of appreciation of a democratic norm, they are a defining feature of democracy (Ahamba, 2002). Other scholars varying from Nwolise (2007); Nnadozie (2004) and Mkandawire (1999) stress the legitimizing role of election.

Akzin (1960) opines that elections have technical and social significance. In the technical sense, they are the process by which an office is assigned to a person by volition through simultaneous expression of many peoples' opinion. In the social sense, election is the process by which a person gets to office through the participation of the governed. This social aspect of election distinguishes election from appointment which is the cognitive account of voting. The social sense boils down to democracy and distinguishes election from appointment as true election must be with the consent of the governed. This then portends that any election result that is contrary to the votes cast by the people creates a legitimacy crisis.

Okoye (2007:23) defined election as:

A complex set of activities with different variables that act and feed on one another. It can be defined as a "formal act of collective decision that occurs in a stream of connected antecedents and subsequent behavior". It involves the participation of the people in the act of electing their leaders and their own participation in governance. Elections are not necessarily about Election Day activities although it forms an important component. It encompasses activities before, during and after elections. It includes the legal and constitutional framework of elections, the registration of political parties, party campaigns, the activities of the electronic and print media in terms of access; it includes campaign financing, the activities of the security agencies and the government in power. It includes the authenticity and genuineness of the voters register; it includes the independence or lack of it of electoral agencies and organs. It includes the liberalism or otherwise of the political process in the country and the independence of adjudicating bodies of elections.

The essence of democratic elections is that elections be free and fair. The idea of democratic self-government is incompatible with electoral forces (Ojo, 2008). Thus, free and fair election is a *condicio sine qua non* for a political system to be termed democratic, but not every election fulfills these criteria.

From the above, not just any kind of election can be termed democratic. Credible free and fair elections are a salient indicator of democratic consolidation and the principal institutionalized means of forming and changing democratic government (Aiyede, 2007). Election provides the platform for debate, persuasion and common rules for choosing representatives of the people who can serve in executive, legislative, and other institutions of government. Elections are in this sense a critical means of social conflict management through peaceful deliberations and decision-making processes in which parties abide by the pre-election promises and the loser given the opportunity to provide constructive criticism as the opposition or merely a wait till the next election period.

For example, the 2015 Nigeria's general elections reflect this argument where the candidates contesting elections were given opportunity to discuss issues affecting security during and after elections as a pact or social contract between the government and the citizens. In this case therefore, election becomes in the word of Robert Dahl, a mutual security pact (Dahl, 1973) and operates with the consistent consent of elites under conditions of bound uncertainty (Przeworski, 1991).

Elections are means of selecting those to represent the people in different public positions within the polity. Election "provides citizens with influence over policy making" (Powell Jr., 2000). Elections could be ratificatory in the sense that they may aim at giving a sitting government some appearances of popularity and mobilize the people for popular participation in development. But under liberal democracy, elections play wider roles such as: instruments of accountability, mobilization of the people, promotion of legitimacy, among other functions. Competitive political elections are vital to the survival of the liberal variant of democracy. This democratic method of arriving at acceptable political leaders is well expanded in Schumpeter's (1942) articulation of this arrangement as the: Institutional arrangement for arriving at political, legislative and administrative decisions. It is a method by which the individual acquires the power to participate in decisions by means of a competitive struggle for the peoples vote.

It is instructive to note that, under liberal democracy, phrase like "competitive struggle" tends to be emphasized more than the consensual approach to politics. Thus, central to the survival of this democratic method is the imperative of playing by the rule of the game. It is the conformity with this stated imperative that allows for uninterrupted transfer of power from one administration to the other. In Nigeria for instance, the assumption has been seriously debated where politicians see power transfer do and die affairs by favouring their political associates instead of acting to the rules of the game. Consequently the actions of political leaders in Nigeria make elections to be naked power struggle and violence accompanied event during and after elections.

Again, once a sitting government knows that it can be voted out of power within the framework of periodic elections, it strive to pursue the socioeconomic and political interests of the electorates who may switch allegiance

to opposition parties if such government fails to meet their expectations. Thus, the legitimacy that “the capacity of the political system to engender and maintain the belief that the existing political institutions are the most appropriate ones for society” (Lipset, 1963) is seen as central to the survival of liberal democracy. As people develop attachment to and belief in the prevailing political system because they trust in its ability to meet their short and long term needs. Political stability that this system spawns helps to promote development in the body polity.

Roles of Elections in Political Systems

Elections all over the world is seen as a peaceful means of electing representatives into government so as to push the demands of the people to the highest level of policy making. This is done periodically in democratic regimes by conducting free and fair elections and the electorates are allowed to exercise their franchise by voting a candidate or a party whom the electorates see to be the best choice among other options (Ladan-Baki, 2016).

Election is generally accepted in all climes of the world as the hallmark of democracy. However, since the advent of democratization in Africa in the 1990’s, a great deal of emphasis has been placed on holding regular elections (Molomo, 2006). There can be no doubt then that the political acts that surround leadership succession and regime change constitute a serious aspect of political life in any society. In political systems in general, and in African Politics in particular such act constitutes an important index of development or determination of politics (Anise, 1974).

In every democracy, election is the essential ingredient that allows transition from one regime to the other. It is the means and process by which the electorates decide who and which group administers the affairs of the country based upon their perceived conviction on the agenda and programme presented by the group (Aniekwe and Kushie, 2011). Odukoya (2007) further asserted the value and essence of election, by contending that election is an empirical demonstration of a citizen’s liberty and political choice. It is for this that it serves to legitimized the government. That is it provides a veritable platform for transformation of the lives and welfare of the people through good governance.

In its true sense, there can never be a democracy without election. Democracy, according to Appadorai (1975) is a government whereby the people exercise the governing power either directly or through representatives periodically elected by them. This scholar further posits that democracy is a form of government in which political power is with the mass of the people as the ruling power of a state is legally vested not any particular class or classes but in the members of the community as a whole. Thus, the primary means by which the people exercise their sovereignty is the vote through elections. Therefore, democratic systems are largely a product of electoral system as elections are required for the emergence of the peoples’ representatives as well as other elective office holders. Therefore, elections as a concept in a democratic system cannot be overemphasize because of the role it plays; it is the cornerstone of any democracy. It is an important variable that is very relevant for any democracy to thrive or succeed and the minimum yardsticks to assess to viability of any democratic system.

Transitions in numerous countries today have continued to reveal that democracy is possible without election. But what type of democracy is this? Huntington is however quick to point out that, a political system is democratic, “to the extent that its most powerful collective decision-makers are selected through fair, honest and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes, and in which virtually all the adult population is eligible to vote (Huntington,1991). In proper sense, election is a process of selecting the officers or representations of organizations, parties or groups by vote from its qualified members (Nwolise, 2007). Election is central to the effective functioning of modern representative democracy. Since direct democracy has become almost impossible to practice on account of the large population in every modern political society, electing or selecting political leaders through periodic elections has become the norm. This is particularly so under liberal democracy. As Schumpeter (1942) puts it “democracy means only that the people have the opportunity of accepting or refusing the men who are to rule them”. Since everybody cannot make such decisions at any given point in time, they have to select those to represent them.

An extended version of this argument on liberal democracy and election is put forward by Sandbrook (cited in Adejumobi, 2000) “political system characterized by regular and free election in which politicians organize into parties, compete to form the government by right of virtually all adult citizens to vote and by guarantee of a range of familiar political and civil rights”. It means that there is an organic link between democracy and elections. For this linkage to be productive, it has to meet certain essential conditions. These include: the people have to be empowered to make political choice without hindrance, and the political atmosphere under which this choice is made should be free from threat, intimidation and manipulation. Also, the practice of choosing political leaders should cohere with the cultural values of the people which should safeguard the exercise. In other words, elections must be compatible with democracy that is being practiced in a given country. For election to make meaning to a democratic system, it must go beyond a ritualistic exercise carried out periodically.

In today’s world, election is serving great purpose both in war torn, authoritarian as well as democratic societies. It services as a means of transition from bitter experiences of war to civility in former war torn states. It

provides opportunity for freedom in previous authoritarian regimes and offer citizens the space to free expression. It offer a government a unique opportunity for legitimacy and is also a recognized way of building trust in former authoritarian states and also a way to validate negotiated political pacts (Brown, 2003; Sisk, 2008). Election also serves as a transitory process in stable democracies and a way of strengthening an already assumed perfect system.

Elections are of utmost importance in any Democratic country. As we all know, democracy is defined as a government of the people, for the people and by the people. Such governments, as in the ancient city states of Greece, can be formed with the people directly participating in them. But in countries like India, Nigeria, China, the U.S.A., in the former U.S.S.R. now Russia or in any modern state with several million people, cannot have direct democracy.

In Nigeria, which is among the largest democracy in the world in terms of vastness and population, governments both at the center and in the constituent states are elected for four-year terms. The electorate of so many people in this regions participate in the election, held on the basis of universal adult franchise, and send their representatives to both the Parliament and the state legislatures, expecting that these representatives will safeguard their interests and work to attain the goal of progress, prosperity, unity and integrity of Nigeria as also to ensure rights and freedom of the people. In this indirect democracy the elections play the most important role in shaping the destiny of the people, and the people, while exercising their franchise, constitute the real source of power in the elections as they make their choice and elect only those in whom they have faith.

Ever since its independence, Nigeria big, bursting with energy and ideas, boastful, brusque, and bawdy has known that the aspirations and hopes of Africa rested on its ample, restless shoulders. Today Nigeria, having survived decades of despotism and profligacy, is engaged strenuously in a critical exercise of nation. 2015 elections are one of the major components of that still to be completed project. Electing a President, Parliamentarians (Senate and House of Representatives members), Governors, and all of the Assemblymen in the thirty-six state legislatures demonstrate how effectively Nigeria and Nigerians have entered a new era of accountable government. Nigerians have fought hard to ensure that democratic elections are the required and preferred way for government representatives to access, maintain and give up political power. As a result, competitive elections in Nigeria are no longer the exception; they have gradually become the rule. Since the early years of democratization in 1999, the focus has shifted from the quantity of multiparty elections to the quality, with an emphasis on their credibility and legitimacy. In successful elections, the outcome is accepted by the majority of key contestants and voters (Ronke and David, 2012). Indeed, the roles of election in Nigeria could not wish away. According to Kofi Annan in his speech during visit to Nigeria during the 2015 that:

I think the Nigerian election is extremely important because of the role you play in the region and globally because of your size and your active role on the international scene. Not only are you participating in UN peace keeping but also a member of the Security Council and have an important role to play. If Nigeria prospers, the region will also do; if you get it wrong, the region also pays the price. So your election is extremely important, not just for you but for the region but most importantly for Nigeria. We have to try and deliver a fair and credible election.

Election is one of the most important pillars of democracy. Indeed, it is a necessary condition for democracy because it provides the medium for the expression of the core principles and purposes of democracy such as the sovereignty of the citizens; freedom, choice and accountability of political leaders. In order to serve these purposes of democracy, elections must be free and fair. The notion of free and fair election expresses several conditions, including absence of manipulation, violence and fraud as well as impartiality of election management authority and effective participation by the electorate at all stages of the electoral process (Alemika and Omotosho, 2008). Although it could be argue at this juncture that successive elections in Nigeria since the colonial period lacked the essential ingredients of democratic electoral process: transparency, fairness and freeness. This failure is due to several factors: manipulation of the decisions and activities at the various stages of electoral process by the governments and politicians; corruption of officials and electorates, violence during campaigns, polling and collation; rigging through the stuffing, snatching and destruction of ballot boxes (Alemika and Omotoso, 2008:10).

Nigeria was at crossroads during the period preceding the elections. The elections were crucial because the quality of the electoral process and the elected officials it produced will determine either the progress or the regress of the nation. Patriotic civil society organisation recognized the import of the election in the country's history. It is necessary however, to note quickly here that it is not every election that is democratic.

Put differently, every election does not promote democracy. To be sure, a democratic election, as Ojo (2007) has also pointed out, is an election that is free and fair. No polity can be adjudged democratic if elections are not free and fair. What generally prevail in Nigeria in the previous elections are symbolic elections. In its true sense, the election goes beyond symbolism. As noted by Kirkpatrick (1991), democratic elections are not merely symbolic. They are competitive, periodic, inclusive, definitive elections in which the chief decision-maker in a government is selected by citizens who enjoy broad freedom to criticize government, to publish their criticism and to present alternatives.

However, it could be argue at this juncture that the above significance of elections worldwide is just one of

the element of peaceful transition because elections is also important to authoritarian regimes for gaining legitimacy from the citizens. For example, authoritarian regimes that hold elections including Egypt do not democratise at all, rather they do it simply to well-institutionalise their authoritarian regimes so that they can be accepted (Blaydes, 2008). It is argued that in Sudan since independence in 1956, elections have been designed to satisfy international opinion. This implies that authoritarian leaders know it well that “elections are reliable vehicles, which can broaden and deepen citizens’ loyalty to build popular legitimacy for a successful political regime (Willis *et al*, 2010). Thus, it is obvious that importance of elections in authoritarian regimes is to bringing about broad public confidence both at international and local levels to endorse their stay in power. The argument is that elections cannot only be regarded as a fundamental pillar in democratic system; it is also a useful credible practice in authoritarian regimes. It has served many authoritarian leaders to hold onto power.

More evidently, in spite of the importance of election in Nigeria, it could be argues that the poor villagers in Nigeria who constitute the majority of the electorate are often found quite apathetic towards he sophisticated election process and they do not have the education to distinguish one from the other. Hence, the representatives, once elected, work only for self-aggrandizement and are contented only to enjoy the fruits of power for four years, doing nothing for the poor electors. When they are back again at the hustling they cajole and coax the voters with new sets of promises, or simply buy their votes with enormous money-power at their disposal. The voters, in the process, lose all their interest in the elections and they either abstain from voting or cast their votes only as a matter of ritual. Such elections are not in the finest traditions of democracy, nor does the power of such democracies emanate from the people. The people cannot always help participating in these elections, but their votes do not quite represent their choice. So the elected governments, instead of conforming to the democratic norms and values, are often found to become authoritarian and autocratic, developing a sort of cynical disregard for people’s aspirations.

To this end, Elections are just a starting point in a healthy democracy; the true test is a stable government that protects minority rights, rule of law, and free speech, and promotes a strong civil society. Elections in a healthy democracy hold governments accountable to the governed and ensure stability. Democratic elections are widely recognized as a foundation of legitimate government. By allowing citizens to choose the manner in which they are governed, elections form the starting point for all other democratic institutions and practices.

Nigeria’s Elections and its International Image

Election in Nigeria is a serious business, because of the power, fame, economic benefit and the influence it commands. It is seen as a source of livelihood and a rapid means to acquire wealth and power in the society. Elections in Nigeria are characterized by massive frauds, the intimidation of political opponents and controversy. Victories in elections in Nigeria are a must and a do or die contest. This attitude makes losing in electoral contest unacceptable and tension filled. Hence, an atmosphere of winners takes it all and the loser loses all is created, which set the stage for post- election violence through insecurity and other allied vices. These include violence, bombing, criminality, and political killings in the state. Just because of the quality and conduct of elections. Therefore, this violence, insecurity and assassination scramble among the political gladiators, actors and others for political offices. This is to maintain their grip on key strategic positions in government, not for services to the people or for the duties and responsibilities of the office, but for among others things, societal recognition, political relevance, money, and government contracts (Uwaifo, 2012).

In addition, the idea of wealth without work in Nigeria stemmed from the notion that, politics is the only platform for such possibilities. Hence, elections are seen as a fastest means or a medium through which one can achieve success and attain recognition in the society. It is therefore seen, in some villages and indeed elsewhere in Nigeria, as an opportunities to the “share the national cake” (Guardian Newspaper, 2010). Political offices provide a means to impose or perpetuate a particular ethnic group in government and governance, and by so doing dominating other groups, thereby creating fear and tension during elections in Nigeria. Iyayi (1995) argued that, this also makes elections in Nigeria and its processes a very complicated and a highly tensed contest. It is characterized by violence, cheating, civil unrest, and all manner of malpractices and electoral fraud. This violent scramble for political offices through elections now creates electoral violence and insecurity in our society, as a result of an outright manipulation of the electoral process.

Brief Indices of Electoral Violence in Nigeria and its impact on Nigeria’s International Image

Studies of election-related violence (Iyayi, 1995; Uwaifo, 2012), often highlight the perpetuation of patronage politics or a system in which politician are gang-like bosses, that control resources, such as access to jobs and income and the distribution of public services such as good road, healthcare and lucrative government contract. Hence the stakes of elections are often seen as opportunities to engage in corruption, economic, political, and social manipulation of the system.

The follow issues and challenges are identified as sources and root causes of electoral violence, amounting to social insecurity in the Nigerian state:

1. Illegal compilation of separate voter list.
2. Compilation of fictitious names on voter registers.
3. Abuse of the voter registration exercise.
4. Illegal printing of voter card.
5. Illegal possession of ballots boxes.
6. Stuffing of ballots boxes with ballots papers.
7. Falsification of election results.
8. Illegal thumb printing of ballot papers.
9. Voting by under-aged children.
10. Printing of forms used for collation and declaration of election result.
11. Deliberate refusal to supply electoral materials to certain areas.
12. Announcement of results in places where no elections were held.
13. Unauthorized announcement of election result.
14. Harassment of candidates, party agents and voters.
15. Change of lists of electoral officials.
17. Inducement of voters with food items, such as a bag of rice, a bag of salt and money.
18. Refusal to count ballots from opposition strongholds.
19. Changing of results between voting centers and collation centers.
20. Declaration of false results.
21. Annulment of results and the manipulation of the election petition process.

Historically, the 1999 elections came when the military were under pressure by the international community to hand over power to the civilians and at the effect of the annulment of June 12 1993 presidential election allegedly won by MKO Abiola. He was later incarcerated by the military for declaring himself president of the country and this led to his eventual death in prison in 1998. It was upon this, that while everybody was still contemplating about the death of Abiola in prison, that the news of the general Abacha's death was also announced. Base on this development, a vacuum was created in the leadership of the military government (Iyayi, 1995). This therefore meant that the most senior officer had to assume the leadership of the military and country. This felt on general Abubakar, it was general Abubakar, who assume power, as the new head of state. He subsequently revised the transition programme of Abacha (Iyayi 2005). For example, considering the state of insecurity, politically tensed atmosphere in Nigeria then, and a battered international image. As a means to right the injustice and the political murder on the western part of the country (the Yoruba people), he freed political prisoners and lifted the ban on the press and created an atmosphere for political activities to thrive. Allowed the formation of political parties and fixed a date for elections and eventually conducted and supervised the elections and finally handed over to a civilian On May 29, 1999.

This was the beginning of the Fourth Republic in Nigeria, after fourteen years of military rule. Prior to 1999 elections, the state of the nation as regard its social security and international image was none existent due to military rule. The country's international image was so bad that, it was suspended from the commonwealth group, the European Union suspended bilateral relations with it, and Great Britain and Canada ask the then Nigerian ambassador to leave its shores (Iyayi 2005). At the regional level Nigeria lost its credibility and moral capacity to lead, because of its negative conduct and activities in the area of human right violation, lack of democratic reforms and military rule, all these impacted adversely on the nation's international image.

Another major features that characterized the nation before 1999, was the state of the social insecurity, this was the period of military rule. It was also the time when there were much agitation for democratic transformation and civilian rule, but the military in power resisted this agitation rather decided to clampdown on anyone who made or supported such agitation. The progressive went underground, some went abroad and other engaged the press both print and electronic to draw international attention and action against the military regime, this yielded much fruits. The United States also suspended the military leadership and its cronies from travelling to the US and several other international actions against the military government of Nigeria. Thus, the level of insecurity in the nation increased beyond measure, there were series of political killings, assassinations, banditry, murder, civil unrest, and protest. Allegations of state-sponsored killings of prominent Nigerians such as Kudirat Abiola, Chief Alfred Rewane, and the hanging of the playwright and Niger Delta activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa and others, despite appeals for clemency by world leaders, further alienated the country and battered its international image. Its African neighbours treat Nigerian citizens with disdain and oppose almost every of the country's positive move towards gaining international recognition, especially at the United Nations and some of its agencies. A case in point is Nigeria's quest for a seat on the UN Security Council (Iyayi, 2005).

The 1999 elections had three major political parties the AD, APP, PDP, and other minor parties, Like Justice Party, NCP, etc. Hence, elections were conducted and PDP won most of the state and a majority seats in the national assembly, on the May 29 1999, the military handed over to the winner of the presidential elections. The international community through EU and NDI, attested to this in its election monitoring final reports, with each

poll progressively worse than the last, according to many domestic and international observers.

The 2003 General Election and Violence and Electoral malpractices

In April 2003, Nigerians went to the polls for the second time under a civilian government. President Obasanjo, representing the ruling PDP, ran against another former military leader, General Buhari, and Ojukwu, who led the Secessionist region of Biafra in Nigeria's civil war in the 1960s and former foreign minister Nwachukwu. Obasanjo won, and the PDP party also won in legislative elections Iyayi (2005).

The elections were marred by serious irregularities and fraud, according to both domestic and international Election observers, with much emphasis placed on inadequate elections administration. Again, having noted, the flaws in the elections, of which much of this inadequate election administration was attributed to the incompetence and mal-administration of the leadership of the election body, then headed by Prof Maurice Iwu. He was further, alleged to be a card carrying member of the PDP, Thereby questioning his loyalty; the possibilities to undermine other political parties, to secure his position in government (EU Reports, 2003). He was then held responsible by the government in power to secure their returned to power and with the dirty job of fixing and doctoring elections result. This he did well, as attested by the international observer group. The Controversy surrounded the voter registration process, the certification of candidates, and poor Logistical preparations, distribution and allocation of election materials were a suspect. One election official allegedly admitted that the voters' register was 25-30% fakes (NDI Report, 2003)

Reports of electoral fraud, or rigging, were also noted. Ballot box stuffing, Falsification of election result forms, and threats of violence were among the most serious Charges. In some states, observers noted systematic attempts at all stages of the voting process to alter the election results. Although reports of rigging varied widely among states, the extent of Irregularities caused some to suggest that they "compromised the integrity of the elections where they occurred (EU Report 2003).

The European Union delegation noted that in at least six states the minimum Standards for democratic elections were not met. Several election results were later overturned. A number of issues and challenges contributed to the electoral violence in the 2003 general elections conducted in Nigeria. Clearly the spate of social insecurity in the country in 2003, came from the conduct of the 2003 elections it was so bad that, the president (Obasanjo) had to embark on foreign trip to dissuade friendly countries to Nigeria. Nigeria's international image was so smear by the conduct and quality of the 2003 elections that, the commonwealth meeting held.

During the 2003 polls, police allegedly were directly involved in rigging election results and other forms of political intimidation, the International Crisis Group reported, for example, Instead of providing security, the police were often deliberately used to scuttle the electoral process, Thus, there was a strong focus on developing professionalism with the police force to assist in providing neutral and effective ways of complying with national and international standards of conduct (EU Report, 2003).

Inter communal conflicts in parts of the country are common, resentment between the northern and southern regions, and among communities in central Nigeria, has led periodically to considerable unrest and displacement. Thousands have been killed and many more wounded in periodic political clashes in the past decade, perceived ethnic and religious differences have been politicized by some political elites.

That year, Nigeria was not invited. To that extent therefore, the conduct and quality of elections in Nigeria impacted adversely to Nigeria's international image and affected adversely also its relationship with other nations of the world via its suspension from the commonwealth (Daily Trust, 2003).

The 2007 General Elections

Nigeria's third national elections since the return to civilian rule were held in April 2007; amid Wide spread allegations of electoral mismanagement, fraud and violence. The Nigerian Senate had rejected a bid by Obasanjo supporters in 2006 to amend the constitution to allow him to run for a third term. Facing retirement, President Obasanjo backed Umaru Yar'Adua, a northern governor largely unknown to many Nigerians, as the ruling party's presidential candidate. Yar'Adua's running mate, Goodluck Jonathan, had served as governor of Bayelsa State in the Niger Delta. Yar'Adua was declared the winner with over 24.6 million votes, or 70%. Some critics suggest that Obasanjo hand-picked Yar'Adua in order to retain political influence after he left office (Iyayi, 2008).

The country's two largest opposition parties, the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) and the Action Congress (AC), rejected the election results. The ANPP's presidential candidate, General Buhari, who had lost the election in 2003 to Obasanjo, received an estimated six million votes. The AC's candidate, former Vice President Atiku Abubakar, was not among the 24 presidential contenders approved by the Independent National Electoral Commission, allegedly because of pending corruption charges against him. His exclusion exacerbated tensions during the pre-election period, and his supporters contend he was unjustly excluded by INEC because he had opposed Obasanjo's third term (Iyayi, 2008).

A last-minute ruling by the Supreme Court restored Abubakar to the ballot, and he placed third with an estimated 2.6 million votes since a return to multiparty democracy in 1999 after a period of military rule, Nigeria

has experienced political competition and tensions that make electoral processes volatile and often violent.

The International Crisis Group (2007) reported that there was a 'rigging epidemic' in the elections; it noted, among other things, intimidation of voters and election-station monitors, voting by Ineligible persons, improper control of ballot papers and election materials (such as results Sheets) by INEC officials, theft of ballots and boxes, violation of procedures on conferring with party representatives, and deliberate with-holding of voting materials in some stations, and Reported partisan behavior by INEC and security forces (police) personnel. There was considerable international and domestic attention given to the management of electoral conflict, driven by the realization that stability and governmental legitimacy in Nigeria Africa's most populous country is critical for the region and the broader international community (EU Report,2007).

Political violence during the electoral process involved clashes among supporters of the major parties, intimidation of opposition figures, and intimidation of monitors and observers, discusses electoral violence and conflict tracking in regards to the 2007 Nigerian elections (Marco, 2007). However, in Nigeria, levels of violence accompanying the electoral process were lower in 2007 than in the most recent prior election, 2003, which were even more severely troubled. In 2007 an estimated 200 deaths were attributed to election-related violence by European Union observers, whereas in 2003 nearly double that amount were reported by international monitors to have been directly linked to the elections Process. Much of the attention with regard to the prevention of electoral violence was focused on the Nigerian Police Force (NPF), and in particular the allegations of bias among the security forces in favor of the ruling party (EU Report, 2007).

On the whole, the 1999, 2003 and 2007 electoral processes were accompanied by questionable legitimacy, severe logistic and election-management challenges, and social tensions that stemmed from and mirrored party-political, regional, ethnic, religious, and ideological lines. Certainly the conditions for a significant escalation of violence were present in three elections which political confrontation and intrigue, public dissatisfaction, and exceptionally trying electoral logistics set the stage for a potentially widespread and serious electoral conflict (EU Report, 2007).

The 2011 General Elections

This election was seen as the first litmus test for the administration of President Goodluck Jonathan Looking, at the antecedent that brought him to power. This consideration looks at his general background as a southerner, as a former governor, as a vice president, as an acting president and as a president, and finally for the country as a whole. It also focuses on the strength of the nation's democratic institutions, to show what has been learnt over years of democratic rule, in terms of being able to conduct a free and fair election. That is, transiting from one civilian administration to another.

Hence, the 2011 general election was very important to the country as whole. First and foremost, the was a general public outcry and outrage on the leadership of the electoral body. As been an extension of the government, this among other things constituted ingredients of insecurity that could build up over time. That some of the members in the leadership of the electoral body were in indeed, card carrying members of the ruling PDP, Thereby raising suspicion and serious doubt on its independent status and several other issues were raised against the electoral body.

As a result of this, they were systemic breakdown, logistic challenges, funding problems, government interference and a total loss of confidence from both the local and international community. On the integrity and the capacity of the leadership of the electoral body to conduct a free and fair election, based on the following, they were general submission from both from the local and international community on need to change the entire leadership of the INEC, then headed by professor Maurice Iwu. A man who conducted the 2007 elections, regarded to be the worst ever elections so conducted in Nigeria (NDI Report, 2011).

This observation was made by the international observer group, and even president Yaradua who benefitted from the election. Even acknowledged this in his inaugural speech, stated that, the elections were flawed and questionable, based on this, he instituted justice Uwais panel to look into the matter and make appropriate recommendation to government on the way forward as regard the conduct of future elections in Nigeria. Unfortunately, however, president Yaradua never lived to the see the recommendation of justices Uwais report, it was his vice president (Good luck Jonathan) who received the report and superintended over the conduct of the 2011 elections, as acting president (EU Report, 2011).

Now became his call and responsibility to decide the future of then chairman of the electoral body, this decision was finally made, after due considerations and consultations with the stakeholder. It is important to note here that, electoral processes are critical in every stage, therefore the leadership and independence of the umpire is important. Hence, Professor Maurice Iwu was relieved of his appointment as INEC chairman. Professor Attahiru Jaga was appointed as the new INEC Chairman this was to address the leadership and integrity challenges of the electoral body. This he did on 2011 elections, though, the elections started with some logistical challenges, initially, it was strategically surmounted and elections were conducted as scheduled.

A critical point to note in the 2011 elections was the openness and transparency of the electoral body, the

accessibility of all political parties to electoral body itself was commendable and applauding. The counting of votes after voting at polling centers and the announcement of results and display of these results at the polling centers was also creative and innovative. This was a complete shift in paradigm from the norm of announcing electoral results in Abuja (Daily Trust, 2011)

Another creative feature of the electoral body as headed by Professor Jega included, the registration of many political parties, prominent among them include the PDP, ANPP, AC, CPC, Labour Party, APGA, NCP to mention but a few. These political parties contested in different levels of the 2011 elections. However PDP won the presidency and majority seats in the national assembly and the states assemblies. But a critical point to note was the fair level of acceptance and 2011 election enjoyed from both the local and international community.

However, this cannot be said in all parts of the country, because of the attendant happening that followed after the elections, the scourge of violence and the state of social insecurity that had taken over some parts of Nigeria is unimaginable, this scourge called the Boko Haram; this group has terrorizes some parts of the Nigerian state, it motives indicates a political undertone which stemmed from the just concluded 2011 elections, because this was further affirmed by the national security adviser to the president "that it was the zoning formula in the PDP that was responsible for the activities of Boko Haram" (AIT, 2012). Its unwholesome activities, included among others things, an attempted terrorist attack on government facilities such as the police, immigration buildings, church and mosque building and several other attacks too numerous to mention.

Series of recent bombings and a state of insecurity has prompted the government to adopt new anti-terrorism measures and approach in containing this group. Some scholars contends that, the evolution and rise of the militant terrorist group otherwise known as Boko Haram is a reaction and response to the emergence of a South South President. This been that, northern part of Nigeria is having a feeling of loss of political power to the south, hence a reaction from this element in the north, vowing to make the country ungovernable. Thereby creating a sense of tension and social insecurity in the country, hence the emergence of sectarian groups is political in character, rather than religious as is being speculated.

Again, the change in the political leadership of the country, Nigeria has become very unstable, unsafe and grossly insecure, because of the activities of the sect. Indication simply pointed out to the election of April 2011, this is seen as a reaction to this historic change that a southern can rule Nigeria, is one notion some political forces in the northern Nigeria cannot live with, hence the present violent activities of the sect is impacting negatively and adversely on the international image of the country. The bombing of the UN building and killing of some foreign nationals has destroyed the international image of the country (Matters Arising, AIT 2012).

Boko Haram activities and operations in Nigeria connotes a feeling and a sense of loss of political power and control to the south, hence use of violence to create a state of insecurity and tension in some parts of the country. Furthermore, what should be stated here is that, elections has a far reaching implication on Nigeria's international image, such that when, the electoral process is not transparent, open, free and fair. It can destroy a nation's international image and her relationship with other nations, if not properly managed and effectively and efficiently administered. The 2011 elections represent a fair attempt by the elections administrators and managers to conduct free and fair elections in Nigeria, though there were reported cases of double standards by the officials of the electoral body. These cases were isolated in nature and in some part of the country, in all the 2011 elections reflected the true wishes and intent of the generality of the Nigerian people.

More evidently, after the Presidential elections on 18 April 2011, violence erupted in the North and in the Middle-Belt of the country including Kano, Kaduna, Gombe, Bauchi, Adamawa and Taraba States, probably triggered by the perception of the presidential results. Protesters burnt places of religious worship, public buildings and the houses of politicians from the ruling PDP and religious leaders considered to be related to the party, targeted INEC buildings and its personnel, including the NYSC members serving as INEC ad hoc staff and in Bauchi State ten of them were killed in a gruesome manner. Also the palace of the Sultan of Sokoto, the highest Muslim authority in the country was attacked. Protesters clashed with the security forces. All in total hundreds of persons were murdered and tens of thousands were displaced. The authorities imposed a curfew in the affected States until heavy military presence restored order in the following days. In the afternoon of 21 April, INEC Chairman Prof. Jega announced that due to the security situation, the gubernatorial elections in Bauchi and Kaduna States were postponed from 26 to 28 April (EU Report on 2011 Elections).

Violence erupted in the northern part of the country and the middle-belt areas, based on the results as announced by the electoral body. Hence perception of a change in the presidential results prompted a sense and a feeling of loss of political power in that regard, thereby resulting into violence which created insecurity in the polity.

Domestic and international observer groups were highly critical of the 2007 and 2011 elections, and many questioned the credibility of the election results. Violations and irregularities reported by election Observers included polling locations opening late, closing early, or not opening at all; errors on the ballots; underage voting; vote buying; ballot box stuffing and theft; and falsified results Sheets. Media reports also documented widespread incidents of thuggery and coercion at polling Places. The largest domestic monitoring group suggested that

elections were so flawed that they should be held again. According to the U.S.-based National Democratic Institute (NDI) delegation, led by former Secretary of State Madeline Albright and several former world leaders, in many places, and in a number of ways, the electoral process failed the Nigerian people. The cumulative effect substantially compromised the integrity of the electoral process. The European Union delegation declared that the elections “have not lived up to the hopes and Expectations of the Nigerian people and the process cannot be considered to have been credible. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) delegation was similarly critical, suggesting that irregularities and the sporadic violence characterized and challenged the validity of the elections. The U.S.-based International Republican Institute (IRI) called the 2007 elections Below acceptable standards, noting that the resolution of election disputes would be “critical” to Restoring the credibility of the country’s democratic process (EU Report 2011).

Electoral Violence and 2015 General Elections

The 2015 general elections, violence were recorded though it was mostly exhibited at the South South geopolitical zone of Nigeria in states like Rivers and Akwa Ibom. The ruling party the PDP and its agents were accused of deploying all means necessary including barbaric methods to clinch victory at the polls. In Akwa Ibom state prior to the elections, candidates were even murdered by unknown gun men and in some cases maimed. There has been a barrage of accusations and counter accusations by the All Progressives Congress claiming that the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) used its hoodlums, security agencies and its thugs to truncate the elections in their favour. The opposition parties in the state claimed that there was no election held in that state and that the PDP rigged the elections (Vanguard News, April 2015; Baki, 2016). The state chairman of the APC Mr. Attai petitioned the then Independent National Electoral Chairman (INEC) Professor Attahiru Jega on the level of irregularities in the state which include connivance with INEC officials and police to rig elections, missing result sheets etc. Attai argued that:

In areas where polling materials were received hordes of deadly armed thugs escorted by men in Nigeria Police Uniform stormed the polling units and made away with the election materials midway into accreditation. For instance in Ndiya 3 Unit 004 in Nsit Ubium which happens to be the polling unit of our governorship candidate, election materials were supplied but thugs invaded the place and took away all the election materials. Given the widespread failure of the INEC to supply election materials to most parts of the state, the rampant snatching of ballot boxes and the bloodletting by PDP thugs that characterized the conduct of the elections, we as a party hereby call for an outright cancellation of the elections. Their outcomes cannot be allowed to stand because they can never reflect the wishes of Akwa Ibom people (Vanguard News, April 2015; Baki, 2016).

From the above, it is clear that there was no election in Akwa Ibom state because there was chaos everywhere and people scampered for safety. Similarly a PDP member Obong Victor Attah agreed that there was widespread electoral violence with cases of ballot box snatching, Smart Card Reader (SCR) snatching among others. Attah further lamented that:

I got to my unit a little before 10 am that fateful day with my PVC in my hand and I looked round and the whole place was empty. Except for the people who came out to vote I did not see any INEC staff. The story I got is not a matter of hijacking on the way to this unit but at the distribution center that people came with guns and machetes and shot in the air and carted away all of the materials and I said including even your card readers? And the answer was yes. “And this issue of shooting and attacking people and carting away materials including card readers, what does anybody want to do with card readers?

They want to use it to accredit who? We used to understand that they take away ballot papers and thumb printing and so on but now you did not even allow accreditation to take place. “So my appeal which I have made to everybody that is prepared to listen is to accept the fact that truly there were no elections whatsoever in this state. I am not talking about my unit. I am talking about cancelling the election in Akwa Ibom and conducting a fresh one as soon as INEC finds it possible so that all eyes will be beamed on Akwa Ibom, and people will now be forced to do proper elections. It is now I am beginning to understand why Akwa Ibom was regarded as battle ground. But I didn’t come to fight. I came to do an election (Vanguard News, April 2015).

However many scholars attributed the violence to the PDP in trying to retain power since the presidential candidate Dr. Goodluck Jonathan was from the South South political zone of Nigeria so they had to make sure they won by all necessary means in that state.

However, this has clearly shown how violence and irregularities surrounded the general elections in the South South all in an effort to retain the power of the PDP in that particular geopolitical zone. But on the other hand the people needed the desired change because of the 15 years of zero dividends of democracy under the stewardship of the PDP. But in the Northern part of the state. States like Kano, Kaduna, and Bauchi are usually the flashpoints

of electoral violence. Scholars have recorded that violence usually erupts when the results are announced and riots break out as a result of the manipulation of results to favor the ruling party PDP to retain power like was seen in Zaria and Kaduna North Kaduna State where the government had to deploy the army to put the rioters under control (Sun News, 2011). This time around APC got its overwhelming support even from states who supported the PDP in the past such as Plateau and Benue states who voted enemas for the APC. Both in the Northern and Southern states like Lagos minimal violence was recorded and even the international observers applauded the northern zones to do better to shun electoral violence. But in reality for the past 15 years, the polls never went the way of the electorate which always resulted to riots to make their position known. This was evident when the chief electoral umpire of the state professor Jega returned Buhari of the APC as the president elect and this was met with jubilation from all over the nation and violence was not recorded when the result was released. From my own perspective in Nigeria, whenever elections in Nigeria turn violent it is as a result of the results not favoring majority of the electorate. The electorate know who they want as their representative but from out of the bloom, a new winner emerges which is never the reflection of the electorate. And this is why the people came together to form a coalition to defeat the PDP at the just concluded 2015 general elections in Nigeria.

The security agencies especially the Nigeria Police have become compromised and corrupt that their loyalty is to the politicians and not the common Nigerian. To buttress further, previous elections and even the just concluded 2015 elections had numerous reports of police men terrorizing and shooting the electorate and in some cases they accompanied thugs to snatch sensitive electoral materials. At the polls in Rivers state, eye witnesses who spoke to Vanguard News narrated their ordeals on how men of the Nigeria police escorted thugs to cause mayhem and snatch the INEC result sheets from polling units (Vanguard News, 2015). Similarly during the elections in Ekiti state, men and officers of the Nigerian Army worked in connivance with PDP thugs to manipulate the elections and attack the electorate in that state. Eye witnesses told reporters how PDP thugs shot sporadically in the air in the presence of soldiers. To back up this point, a leaked audio tape described how the Commander of the 32 Artillery Brigade General Momoh connived with PDP members to rig the elections in favor of the ruling party.

However, from the EU report 2011, it is observed that the international community out rightly condemned the post-election violence that engulf some part of Nigeria particularly the northern Nigeria. It further demonstrated the link between elections, social insecurity and Nigeria's international image, Soremekun (2011) contends that international politics is a reflection of internal politics of a nation, that what is projected into international arena as international politics is indeed internal politics of the nation, which is among other things a function of the personal interest and the idiosyncrasies of the leadership of that nation that is play in the international arena. Nigeria's international image in historical perspectives as Saliu (2002) submitted a picture of a positive international image for Nigeria in the 1960's. The international image was tarnished in a way by the country's civil war between (1967- 1970) which stemmed partly by the dissatisfaction and disagreement of electoral results.

Electoral violence ensued via political killings and social insecurity in the nation resulting to a full blown war. After the civil war Saliu (2002) contends that the country's international image soared high in the world during murtala/obasanjo administration, that Nigeria situated Africa as the centerpiece of her foreign policy, indeed assumed the proper role of an African leader. Her views were always sought on Africa Affairs even by former colonizers (Saliu, 2002).

Furthermore, as contended by Soremekun (2011) that a nation's domestic politics is projected into the international environment, hence the magnitude and the state of social insecurity also impacts adversely on the nation's international image via its domestic politics. The culture of impunity via flawed electoral process and administration was what characterized the 1999 elections this was evidence in the incessant court cases and public outrage and the rejection of the results by the international community.

Elections conducted in Nigeria over the years has led to electoral violence due to incompatibility in interest among and within the stakeholders (where lives and properties of the people are lost) resulting to a high state of insecurity and a bad international image in the comity of nations. Soremekun (2011), asserted that, international politics is an extension of domestic politics. That it is the reflection of individual views, personal values, choices, and preferences of the people in leadership into the international environment. That a nation is an abstraction, but the people and their actions, conduct and general behavior constitutes a nation. The way and manner of its domestic politics is a direct and indirect reflection, perception, beliefs and position of a nation in the international environment. Therefore, the consequence of bad elections is a post-election violence, civil unrest, mass protest and poor international image. The consequence of poor quality of elections is the bad image it portrays Nigeria in the international environment; as being unsafe, unreliable and politically unstable, thereby deterring international investors from engaging in viable and serious foreign investments. This is badly needed for the growth and development of the national economy (Uwaifo, 2012). To this end elections conducted in a violence and misconduct manner not only affected domestic politics but also portray wrong international image in a given country.

Conclusion

Violence is the greatest enemy of democracy, being the bane of Nigeria's march to democracy. There can be no democratic election, democratization, consolidation of democracy, growth in democratic culture or internalization of best democratic practice in any country if electoral violence is prevalent. There is need for Nigeria to build on the existing institutions that would ensure credible elections so that future elections would be more violent-free than the recent elections. This is because election is an empirical demonstration of a citizen's liberty and political choice. It is for this that it serves to legitimize the government. It also provides a veritable platform for transformation of the lives and welfare of the people through good governance. Indeed, elections have come to be a yardstick for measuring a nation's position and status in the comity of nations. The determinant factors for the growth and development of democracy in the eyes of the international community is the quality, manner and conduct of a free and fair election. It is on this premise that any government is accorded the most converted respect, honor and legitimacy, via the electoral process upon which it ascended to power. When electoral process possesses the outlook of free and fair process, it provides a means through which direct popular participation and legitimacy is earned. It creates capacity for effective and efficient management of the nation's resources.

However, while it could not be denied that the electoral process produced better outcomes than previous elections in Nigeria, there are still critical areas of concern which need urgent attention as shown in the study. Scholars seem to focus more on happenings on the Election Day to judge the quality of elections, but some argue that the entire process must be generally examined. Indeed, the 2015 general elections may appear positive in terms of the assessment of the Election Day; however, there are many issues to be addressed at the pre-election phase of the electoral process. This includes strengthening the legal instruments governing the country's elections especially in light of outstanding issues that have been highlighted for reform by various stakeholders, the party selection of candidates at the primaries level, campaign media, and campaign finance. To address most of these problems, the improvement of the independence and capacity of INEC is very important and there is need for strengthening measures to punish election offenders to deter potential violators of the electoral law.

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