

**ELECTORAL ADMINISTRATION AND THE
CONSOLIDATION OF DEMOCRACY: AN OVERVIEW OF
2011 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT:

For over two decades, there has been a new wind of democratic change sweeping across Africa where multiparty political systems were being installed all over the continent to replace the fallen authoritarian and dictatorial regimes. Today, democracy sits on the horn of a dilemma in several parts of Africa including Nigeria. As at now, the inadequacies of democracy and its practice as a political ideology in Nigeria are being illustrated by the tactics and tantrums of Nigerian political leaders and faulty political process. Democratic consolidation in Nigeria is complicated by the apparent malfeasance of the country's electoral management body (the Independent National Electoral Commission - INEC) - yet; the problematic of electoral administration in the country is scarcely studied. Nigeria's fourth successive general elections since the return of democracy in 1999 were held last April. Expectedly, numerous bodies including civil society groups who played key roles in ensuring effective participation of the citizens in the electoral process and that its outcomes were credible and acceptable, have taken a backward look at the electoral experience, taking stock, with a view to creating a pathway for sustainable and wholesome democratic elections for the country. The paper examines the interface between credible elections and democratic consolidation, and how electoral fraud has become a threat to the

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survival, growth and consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. The article examines the primacy of electoral votes in an emerging democracy and its implications of democratic consolidation and good governance in Nigeria. Drawing from the 2011 elections, the paper submits that the electorate votes has begin to count for who emerges as a winner and accounts for the improvement in democratic governance in Nigeria. Factors responsible for this were identified by the paper and suggest as a panacea that, the state should de-invest in politics and also digitize its electoral process. With the April 2011 general elections, Nigeria may have taken steps towards reversing the degeneration of its previous elections, but the work is not finished. Despite some progress, early and intensive preparations for the 2015 elections need to start now. This paper provides some important recommendations that would serve as a panacea to the problems of election riggings and how those measures can help necessitate a democratic environment which is a precondition for free and fair elections.

INTRODUCTION:

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).

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.

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-building. April's 2011 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 (Rotberg, 2007). 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 democratisation 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.

Nigeria's present democratization, which culminated in the country's Fourth Republic on May 29, 1999, started amidst great hope and expectations. Although the military regime that midwived the process could not significantly convince the generality of the citizens on its success, a huge section of the populace still believed it could herald the dawn of good governance in the country. Disturbingly, twelve years after the commencement of democratization in Nigeria the political landscape is yet to show clear evidences of good governance. The rule of law is merely pronounced, elections and electoral processes are subverted, and political parties and other important public institutions are manipulated in favour of the privileged few (Yagboyaju, 2011).

Nigeria's transition to democracy has been rough showing occasional relapse to authoritarianism. The quality of election, which is one of the mechanisms for gauging the extent of democratic consolidation, has shown evidence of progressive decline over the polls conducted. Nigeria's Fourth Republic, which has witnessed four general elections (1999, 2003, 2007, and 2011), is yet to show profound evidence of a growing democracy. All of these elections were marked with controversies, just as their processes and end products encountered credibility and legitimacy crises (Yagboyaju, 2011).

CONCEPTUAL EXPLORATION:

The essence of conceptualisation is to give operational definitions to some of the important concepts used in the discourse. As Rubin and Babbie (1989) have noted, we specify what we mean when we use particular terms for the purpose of facilitating their contextual operationalisation and comprehension. In this paper, the conceptual construction of the concepts of election, electoral administration, democracy and democratic consolidation are undertaken for the purpose of ensuring clarity and easy comprehension of the discourse.

Elections are a central feature of democratic governance, a testimony to peoples' sovereignty. Elections have meaning for most people only in a democratic context, because they lead to the choice of decision makers by the majority of citizens. Elections and democracy are therefore inextricably linked (Aniekwe & Kushie, 2011).

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). Okoye (2007) 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.

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 await till the next election period. 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, 1991:12).

Election is crucial because it gives the procedure that allows members of an organization or community to choose representatives who will hold positions of authority within it. In any democratic system, it is crucial that elections be free and fair. Mackenzie (1967) identified four conditions for the conduct of a free and fair election viz.: (1) An independent judiciary to interpret the electoral laws. (2) An honest, competent non-partisan electoral body to manage the elections. (3) A developed system of political parties. (4) A general acceptance by the political community of the rules of the game.

Another scholar Dundas (1994) argued that the assessment of an election as to whether it is free and fair or not can be done by answering the following questions: (1) Is the legal framework adequate to ensure that the organization of free and fair multi-party elections be achieved in a given situation? (2) Has the potential to contribute to the holding of free and fair multi-party elections been reflected in the provisions of the constitution and those of electoral laws? (3) Have the courts been given the fullest possible role in assisting aggrieved persons who complain about failures in the procedures of major election processes? (4) Are the election safeguards satisfactorily balanced with the facilitation measures in place and aimed at delivering high quality election services at cost effective levels?

Free and fair elections create the necessary conditions for the development of other components of democracy. The notion of free and fair election refers to an electoral process in which:

- (a) all the citizens who are eligible to vote people are enabled to do so;

- (b) voters make electoral choices without illegitimate inducement and coercion;
- (c) electoral institutions, processes and outcomes are not manipulated by the government, groups and individuals, and
- (d) outcomes of electoral process are determined purely by the votes of the electorate.

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 Omotosho, 2008).

Modern elections are an effort to ensure decency, legitimacy, representation and can thus be a transformative strategy towards full democracy. We need to state that elections by themselves may not lead to a democracy unless underpinned by the capacity of the people to know the reason and meaning of their votes. That is people not only defending their votes, but also democracy and the freedom we have reason to value. The task remains that of how can we strengthen the spirit of election engagement not just its logic which may produce a democracy without democrats.

Electoral administration can be seen as the process of arriving at free and fair selection of candidates to fill public positions. Such activity necessarily involves well coordinated action by men and women aimed at achieving the goal of peaceful and orderly elections in a political system. The overall goal of electoral administration is to ensure that democracy upon which such elections are based is sustained as a mechanism for choosing the peoples' representatives at regular intervals (Ighodalo, 2008).

Democracy on the other hand is not just a set of constitutional rules and procedures that determine how a government functions but are most importantly premised on the fact these rules are determined by the people or their elected representatives whom they have mandated through an electoral process. Democratic principles are interdependent, indivisible and can be most meaningful when citizens get involved as critical actors and beneficiaries. As a complex system of demand, democracy in its practice ensures the citizenry an opportunity to learn from one

another and helps in the formation of societal values and priorities. It gives citizens a political voice in not only voting but respect for election results as part of the expression of their freedom and liberty. Denying this is a major deprivation to the citizen. The vote of the citizen is not only central to democracy but an expression of their equality, right to choice and strengthening of popular participation.

Ojie (2006) states that in a democracy, those whose responsibility is to exercise political authorities in a society perform it with the explicit consent and genuine mandate expressed at periodic intervals by the electorate through an open, free and fair electoral process. This implies that democracy must be a system of government where the people dictate the pace with the general consent of the governed. Unfortunately, Nigeria's elections have so far thwarted the foundation upon which democracy is built due to election rigging. Nigeria is in the category where election management is less successful. The rules guiding elections are ambiguous, ever changing or easily maneuvered; the electoral regulations and rules is institutionally less effective; the political bigwigs are the gladiators in their conduct; hence the electorates are often powerless as they live in the mercy of the political stalwarts and political outcomes (Osinakachukwu and Jawan, 2011). The political barons, who have special interest, impose unpopular candidates and employ every form of political gimmick to influence the election in their favours against the general will of the people.

Democratic consolidation according to Omotola (2002) means a status of democratic maturity such that it can no longer be threatened or truncated by reactionary forces whether internal or external. This implies a democracy that can last for the test of time. This can be assured if those values that made democracy worthwhile are fully institutionalized. Kaur (2007) states that democracy become sustainable when there is credible opposition capable of replacing an incumbent government by offering an alternative outline of politics and strategies that is likely to appeal to the electorate. By the concept of democratic consolidation, it connotes a deliberate political process in a polity by which democracy is "so broadly and profoundly legitimized among its citizens that it is very unlikely to break down" (Osinakachukwu and Jawan, 2011). This is democracy that will come and stay and which cannot come to an end suddenly or abruptly through unconstitutional acts such as military coups or dictatorships. To consolidate democracy, it needs behavioural and institutional changes that normalize democratic politics and

narrow its uncertainty. Democratic consolidation is an off-shoot of good governance which encompasses accountability, security of human rights and civil liberties, devolution of powers and respect for local autonomy, which all constitute a challenge to democratic regimes (Eyinla, 2000: 22). Diamond (1999: 62) defined democratic consolidation as:

...the process of achieving broad (and) deep legitimization such that all significant political actors, at both the elite and mass level believe that the democratic system is better for the society than any other realistic alternative they can imagine.

In fact, democratic consolidation can be measured by the percentage of voters in a country who consider democracy as an indispensable way of life and are ready to go every length to protect it.

In a broader perspective, Azeez (2005: 24) argued that democratic consolidation does not simply mean the defeat of supposedly undemocratic forces and rulers like Kamuzu Banda of Malawi or Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe or the putting in place of democratic institutions and paraphernalia. The survival of democracy has a lot to do with how it is able to better the material conditions of the people in terms of provision of effective and affordable education, shelter, security of life and property, better health care, employment, food, portable water and as well as to ensure political stability and thereby save the people from the scourge of war and other violent conflicts.

Sustainability and consolidation of democracy depend on many factors. The critical factors are:

- (a) inclusive participation;
- (b) free and fair elections with outcomes that reflect the choice of the electorates;
- (c) accountability of the rulers through democratic institutional oversights and periodic and multi-party election;
- (d) protection of human rights;
- (e) scrupulous observance of the rule of law supported by independent judiciary, and
- (f) effective protection of citizens from poverty, ignorance, and insecurity.

Stepan (1996: 33) stressed that democratic consolidation must be more than a commitment to democracy in the abstract; it must also involve a shared normative or behavioural commitment to the specific rules, values, attitudes and practices of a country's constitutional system. This argument is very relevant to the purpose of the study. If democracy is to thrive and develop roots

in the Nigerian polity, there is the urgent need to imbibe and practice requisite democratic norms and values. As such, the widespread practice of undemocratic traditions and norms such as electoral violence and indoctrination of Nigerian youths into this decadent political behaviour will only spell doom for the country's ailing democracy.

ELECTIONS AND ELECTORAL ADMINISTRATION IN NIGERIA:

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 Omotoso, 2008:4).

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. 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 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.

Elections in Nigeria have never gone without serious doubt over its credibility. Beginning from 1979 to date, elections have been conducted without recourse to democratic requirements. It is clear that elections in Nigeria share common features of fraud and irregularities masterminded by overzealous political charlatans and hatched by an unreliable electoral umpire. The 2011 general elections even though described by international observers as free and fair lacked credibility in its conduct especially in the rural areas of Nigeria. Emotionally detached followers of the 2011 elections will agree that the elections were marred by irregularities owing especially to moribund polling methods adopted by Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). A retrospective look at the Nigeria's electoral process shows a country with no regards for the votes of the people. It has become very difficult to enthrone the culture of making votes count in Nigeria (Agbor; Okoro and Adams, 2011).

The history of elections and democracy in Nigeria is also that of an open challenge to the manipulation by a repressive and cynical leadership. Opposition parties, "cultural" associations, professional associations and trade unions have fought existing regimes, calling for more openness and transparency in the interest of all. The trend in the last twelve years has been for the organization of competitive, credible elections to determine who governs. Often, multi lateral and regional organizations have been invited to monitor and observe the electoral process. They have played a critical role in adding to the pressure for a fair competition for the country's leadership. Nigeria has also received international assistance to aid them in overcoming specific obstacles.

THE DILEMMA OF NIGERIAN ELECTORAL ADMINISTRATION:

Periodic, competitive elections are critical attributes of the democratic process. It is like two sides of a coin. Democracy provides for periodic elections in which the people are given the opportunity to choose their leaders, that is, those that would rule over them for a given period of time. Thus, it is through the process of elections that the rulers are given the political mandate to

rule by the people. This process also implies accountability, as the electorate has the opportunity through periodic elections to demand a performance balance sheet from those earlier given the mandate to govern them (Oronsaye, 2008).

It is more than a decade since Nigeria re-entered what Samuel Huntington has popularised as the third wave of democracy. The transition from military to civilian rule and the regularity of elections hitherto unheard of have signalled a momentum towards democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Yet these procedural democratic formalities present fresh challenges of the Nigerian state, the subversion of the political and electoral process, unprecedented election campaign of brinkmanship and manipulation of the electoral body depict the challenges and the extent to which democratic consolidation is in danger in Nigeria. The perversion of electoral process and the consequent outcome has made the quest for democratic consolidation enduring. Indeed, it is the case that Nigerians have lost confidence in the electoral process in Nigeria (Surajudeen, 2008).

Elections in Nigeria have had a chequered history. Past elections had been bedevilled with so many crises as a result of malpractices and improper electoral administration. The electoral processes in Nigeria have always been characterized by crises and dispute over election results. The win at all cost mentality of some politicians which in itself borne out of the materialist perception of behaviour towards the state has rendered the whole electoral process crisis ridden. The win at all cost mentality is fuelled by the promises political offices hold for, would be occupant in Nigeria (Akhakpe, 2008). Mackintosh (1966) underlined the phenomenon thus:

The main cause of Nigeria's (electoral) difficulties is clear. In terms of a western system of government, institutions have been warped because of politics courts for too much. It is the great advantage to be gained by the possession of political power that have encourage parties to use every weapons at their disposal... it is fear of loss of election or posts that has increased the emphasis on tribalism. The horror of defeat is such that legal processes have been strained to try to silence critics....

The aspirations of Nigerians for stable democracy have been constantly frustrated by, among other things, poor administration, and the conduct of the elections and parties campaign strategies. It is widely accepted that elections periodic are among the most important pillars of liberal democracy. Yet, electoral contests in most of the developing countries are dogged by

insurmountable problems, culminating in pre and post election conflicts, often with violently contested result (Surajudeen, 2008).

In some advanced democracies, elections are such a routine matter, that the credibility and validity of each electoral process and cycle is assessed on the quality and performance of new technologies and innovations and how well such creative enterprises bolster the performance of the electoral management body and enhance voter confidences.

The administration of elections in Nigeria is intimidating in its demand. Throughout the long years of colonialism and military rule in Nigeria, democratic aspiration was a constant and powerful driver of political change. Military governments derived their legitimacy in large part from the promise that they were preparing the nation for a return to improved democratic rule, and the regimes that reneged on that promise soon fell. This fundamental public support for democracy has continued through the civilian governments since independence. Although Nigeria is currently enjoying its longest period of electoral democracy since independence, the Fourth Republic has seen the quality of its elections decline progressively with each general election since 1999 (Independent Electoral Assessment Team, 2010).

With an estimated 60 million registered voters and 120,000 polling stations, the challenges in electoral administration are daunting in Nigeria. Prior to the 2007 elections, some observers expressed concern over the pace of election preparations, and INEC's credibility and capacity to conduct a free and fair election was questioned. Nigeria's voter registration process began in October 2006 under a new computerized system. INEC originally allotted a six week period for the process, during which reports suggested the process had "so far fallen only a little short of disaster," but later extended the registration period. Although concerns over the slow start of the registration process were largely resolved, criticism remained that the voter registration list was not widely posted so that voters could ensure their names were registered, in accordance with the Electoral Act of 2006 (The National Democratic Institute, 2006).

Some of the electoral challenges often encountered by the electoral commission and Nigerians in general include electoral protest, violence, thuggery, cancellation of electoral results, litigations, etc. Some, if not all of these crises stem from what could be regarded as the administrative failure of electoral body. Where the independent electoral body is constrained to act by outside

powers, what results are disputed election results and the use of extra-constitutional means to seek redress or demonstrate anger and frustration (Akhakpe, 2008).

Nigerian democracy aims to ensure political stability and promote fundamental human rights. Elections in Nigeria which should have been a prelude for achieving a stabilize government accompanied with people's consent have contradicted these standards because of election rigging. This is a serious concern hence the stability and secured environment needed for the success of democracy have been severely jeopardized (Osinakachukwu and Jawan, 2011).

The various elections conducted in the country since independence in 1960 were generally characterised by fraud, corrupt inducements, intimidation; violence, and pervasive governmental manipulations. These lapses, in the past, triggered mass violence and rejection of election results. Elections conducted since Nigeria's independence have been played in a do or die affair and this has made the peace-loving Nigerians to be dead scared in exercising their voting rights hence the suicidal nature of the politics. Evident has shown that the rate of citizen participation in elections these days have drastically reduced due to the limited choice or lack of qualified candidates. Lacks of candidates with vision have made the electorates politically weak. Sometimes, the electorates are disenfranchised and the alienated political barons employ the use of coercion to seize power or what Ihonvbere (1989) painted in a general picture of Africa's situation as, "rulership became permanent, politics became Hobbesian; power was fought by all means and the struggle for power became the overriding worry".

Adekanye (1990:2) notes that because of the history of electoral fraud, elections in the country have often been associated with political tension, crisis, and even violence. Actually, politics is seen as the only game in town, and it was played with deadly seriousness for the winner won everything and the loser lost everything (Osinakachukwu and Jawan, 2011). Another challenge to electoral administration in Nigeria is the poor funding of the electoral body. The main source of funds for the body is the federal government. But electoral commission hardly gets financial allocation as at when due. Realizing the importance of finance to the proper functioning of the body, the government in power sometimes use at as a subtle way of manipulating the body to achieve their short and long term political and economic goal.

Nigeria is at a critical juncture in its political history. The country has been be-devilled with poor political leadership partly as a result of flawed elections. The electoral standards which

contribute to uniformity, reliability, consistency, accuracy and overall professionalism in elections have been abandoned in previous elections in Nigeria. But there is now a real possibility to conduct credible, free and fair elections in Nigeria with the new electoral law and a credible, respected and radical leadership of INEC. INEC has a responsibility to rise up to the challenge by keeping faith with its vision, mission and principles. In addition, all stakeholders including citizens must perform their roles to make this happen

ELECTION RIGGING: BANE TO NIGERIA'S DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION:

Election rigging since independence in 1960 has delayed Nigeria's hope for a consolidated democracy. For democracy to be consolidated, the government in power must be legitimate. Legitimacy is the belief in the rightness and appropriateness of the ruling regime and the government and their policies by the populace (Dahrendorf, 1996). The ruling government cannot command legitimacy through the use of force; it's the right of the people to grant or withdraw legitimacy from governments (Nwosu, 1976:6) and this varies from time to time depending on how satisfied citizens enjoy from the government in power (Dare, 1975). In Nigeria, election riggings have failed to produce a government that will be popularly acceptable. This is because some of the leaders that emerged victorious in her elections as we analyzed in this work found themselves in the corridors of power using all forms of manipulations and this restricted the chances of true candidates from winning the election even though they are people's choice. When this unpopular candidate is elected, the people will be reluctant to support his administration as they feel that the government is a stolen mandate. Any government that assumes office against the majority votes lacks the legitimacy of the moral authority that popular mandate enjoys. Democracy cannot be consolidated where a candidate is imposed against the choice of the people and a government instituted without people's acceptance will not succeed (Osinakachukwu and Jawan, 2011).

Election rigging has instigated for the emergence of bad politicians who want power by hook or crook. During electioneering, these politicians employ every means to clinch onto power and the installation of these candidates result in corruption and capital accumulations. Obia (2006) observes that the implication of election rigging is that it has been contended that as a result of

electoral fraud the people lost faith in the electoral process more so in opposition politics. One of the cardinal reasons why elections are held is to enforce government responsibility and accountability but electoral fraud strips election of its essence as an instrument of holding leaders accountable to the electorate. A government who rigged itself into power will not have any moral justification to perform hence it has no interest to satisfy anyone. A government is instituted to promote fundamental human rights but where a government does not care about the welfare of her citizens but dwells in accumulation of private wealth, democratic consolidation suffers as government responsibility and her accountability to the electorates would have been rendered useless.

ELECTORAL VIOLENCE AND DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN NIGERIA:

Electoral violence presents one of the gravest threats to many democratizing societies. And there are several manifestations of electoral violence. These include murder, arson, abduction, assault, violent, seizure and destruction of electoral material, overwhelming presence of the gun and other weapon-brandishing soldiers, security operatives and youths. These acts of electoral misdemeanor are perpetuated by individuals and groups (comprising mainly of youths with the aim of influencing the results of elections (Inokoba and Maliki, 2011). It is in light of the foregoing that Ogundiya (2003) defined electoral violence as:

...All sorts of riots, demonstrations, party clashes, political assassinations, looting, arson, thuggery, kidnapping, etc., spontaneous or not, which occur before, during and after elections. It could be regarded as elections motivated crisis employed to alter, change or influence by force or coercion, the electoral behaviour of voters or voting patterns or possibly reverse electoral decision in favour of particular individual, groups or political party.

The electoral process and electoral contestations in Nigeria have usually been accompanied by violence, largely because of the inability of the political elite to harmoniously resolve their differences; their inability to agree a national consensus; and in particular their tendency towards

competitive mobilisation of primordial grievances, thus exacerbating such primordial fissures and triggering violence in the community and polity.

The use of violence in elections is not peculiar to recent and emerging democracies in the developing world. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century England and America, there were documented cases of electoral violence in which force and intimidation were used as a tactical means of winning elections (Seymour and Frary, 1918). However, new democracies are currently leading on cases of electoral violence as highlighted in the case of India and Sri Lanka (Austin, 1994), and also the cases of Kenya, Zimbabwe and Madagascar (Chaturvedi, 2005). Electoral violence is capable of swinging the pendulum of election results create political unrest and as a result instability and slow pace of development.

Nigeria is a heterogeneous country with diverse and overlapping regional, religious, and ethnic divisions. Nigerian culture is as diverse as its population, which is estimated to be around 150 million. With the regaining of political process in 1999 after over thirty (30) years of military rule, Nigeria looked set for a return to stability and the regaining of its position in the committee of nations particularly in Africa (Anieke & Kushie, 2011)

Since the 1999 to the 2011 elections, the Nigeria electoral and political landscape has fallen from par to below par and has moved from violence to greater violence. The level and magnitude of electoral and political violence has risen and the political elites have often converted poverty ridden unemployed Nigerian youths into readymade machinery for the perpetration of electoral violence. This is linked to the political system and institution that in theory has failed to political participation and in practice has seen the political elites forming bulk of the sponsors and perpetrators of electoral violence.

Fischer (2002) sees electoral violence (conflict) as any random or organized act that seeks to determine, delay, or otherwise influence an electoral process through threat, verbal intimidation, hate speech, disinformation, physical assault, forced “protection,” blackmail, destruction of property, or assassination. Igbuzor (2010), views it as

any act of violence perpetuated in the course of political activities, including pre, during and post election periods, and may include any of the following acts: thuggery, use of force to disrupt political meetings or voting at polling stations, or the

use of dangerous weapons to intimidate voters and other electoral process or to cause bodily harm or injury to any person connected with electoral processes.

Election violence generally involves political parties, their supporters, journalists, agents of the government, election administrators and the general population, and includes threats, assault, murder, destruction of property, and physical or psychological harm (International Foundation for Election Systems, 2011; Fischer, 2002). Fischer (2002) highlighted four descriptive categories of conflict and violence that emerge, suggesting a variety of motives, perpetrators, and victims which includes the following.

- I. Disgruntled voters against the state arising from perceived unfairness in the election process
- II. The state in conflict with voters who challenges election result or hegemony of the state
- III. Political rivals in conflict with each other in the quest to attain power and
- IV. A combination of two or more of the above categories

In every electoral process there are always groups popularly called political parties except in highly despotic military regimes. Even in one party system, there is still group formation with existence of intra-party politics. Invariably competition is part and parcel of democracy and it strengthens the quality and level of service to the people. Election therefore is an indispensable part of any political system; nonetheless, it can also involve explicit or implicit use of violence in the contestation either by the political parties contesting the elections themselves or outside agents like the military, labour unions or private militias (Chaturvedi, 2005). However, Chaturvedi warned that electoral violence and the use of force undermines the whole essence of democracy, which rests on freedom, expression and choice.

The electoral violence in Nigerian has been on the rise since the 1999 elections. The level, magnitude and the machinery applied and employed by perpetrators keep evolving. A historical appraisal of Nigeria political system reveals an entrenched culture of political and electoral violence juxtaposed with materialism and monetary inducement in voting. The preview also reveals signs high violence than the previous years even though the level of political awareness over the past four years has risen marginally (Aniekwe & Kushie, 2011).

AN OVERVIEW OF 2011 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA:

Election in any country is very basic to democratic development. Historically in Nigeria, elections are often characterized by rigging, shoddy preparations, failure of the law enforcement process and violence, among others. Observers have, therefore, formed the opinion that the road to the conduct of free and fair elections is full of bumps.

In fact, former President Umaru Yar'Adua came out openly to admit that the 2007 general election, which brought him to power, was seriously flawed. To correct the noticed anomaly, he set up the Electoral Reform Committee on how to improve on the quality of future elections. The Electoral Reform Committee (ERC) issued its findings in December 2008, but the government was slow to commence reforms. In mid-2010, the parliament approved the first of several amendments to the country's electoral laws to incorporate some of the ERC's recommendations and increase transparency in the electoral process. Among the most significant of the reforms were those to increase INEC's independence and fiscal autonomy. INEC's credibility had been badly damaged by the 2003 and 2007 elections (ICG, 2007), and President Jonathan won praise from both Nigerians and the international community for removing the sitting INEC chairman from office in April 2010 and replacing him with a respected academic and civil society activist, Professor Attahiru Jega, in June. Concerns remain regarding the independence of some state-level electoral election commissioners,²⁴ but, according to a survey conducted in late 2010, over 60% of Nigerians had confidence in the current electoral commission, and 74% of Nigerians thought the 2011 polls would be more credible than the last (International Republican Institute, 2010). The recommendations of the committee, to a certain extent, were implemented and they became handy in the conduct of the 2011 elections.

The Jonathan Administration was generally seen as supportive of Jega's efforts to improve the electoral process, backing his budget request and his proposal to delay elections from January to April to allow more time to prepare the 2011 polls (Ploch, 2011). With over 73 million registered voters, almost 120,000 polling stations, and more than 50 political parties, the challenges in administering elections in Nigeria were daunting. The 2011 elections were scheduled to be held on three successive Saturdays, beginning April 2; however, logistical delays in the delivery of materials to polling stations across the country resulted in the delay of the April 2 legislative elections by a week, to April 9. This pushed the timing of the presidential elections to April 16

and the gubernatorial and state assembly elections to April 26. For some, the delay reinforced concerns regarding the credibility of the polls, but others argued that the “trial run” allowed INEC the opportunity to identify and address some deficiencies, particularly related to the voters’ register. Gubernatorial elections were not held in 10 states where post-2007 election court cases led to the overturning of election results or the rerun of elections (Ploch, 2011).

Nigeria’s fourth successive general elections since the return of democracy in 1999 were held last April, 2011. Expectedly, numerous bodies including civil society groups who played key roles in ensuring effective participation of the citizens in the electoral process and that its outcomes were credible and acceptable have taken a backward look at the electoral experience, taking stock, with a view to creating a pathway for sustainable and wholesome democratic elections for the country. Therefore, it was no surprise when even the common man in the street thumbed up the April 2011 elections as the most credible, free and acceptable, as they were not followed with the usual protests and condemnations, not even by the foreign observers who monitored the elections.

It is on record that 2011 elections had very minimal litigations compared with other elections conducted in the past. The declaration of results witnessed open and rare display of good sportsmanship, as some losers like former Speaker, House of Representative, Hon. Dimeji Bankole, accepted defeat and congratulated the winners and even extended a hand of cooperation to them. In the past, the contestants would have formed the opinion that they were rigged out through a fraudulent election. This is an indication that our democracy is becoming deep-rooted and mature. The outcome of the 2011 general election was, therefore, a salutary democratic development in Nigeria, considering the fact that the President that was elected was of a minority ethnic group extraction.

Indeed, a former Chief Justice of the Federation, Justice Mohammed Uwais, who had borne the onerous task of heading the Committee on Electoral Reforms that, set the tone for a review of the electoral culture of the nation. According to Uwais, the success of the last elections was no reason for stakeholders to rest on their oars but that a lot of work was still needed before the nation could attain perfect election. He said: “Although the 2011 general elections have been adjudged free and fair, it is by no means without shortcomings. The desire of Nigerians, of course, is to attain perfect election. However, nowhere in the world is there a perfect election. It

is sufficient if 85 to 100 per cent is attained. I am of the opinion that the elections were free and fair, but all the same there were some shortcomings which we need to correct before we can attain perfect elections” (quoted in Yagboyaju, 2011). Uwais added that government had ignored some very important recommendations by the Committee on Electoral Reforms, regarding the setting up of an Electoral Offences Commission to check perpetrators of electoral violence. “There are quite a number of very important recommendations in the report we made which did not receive fair attention. One of them is our recommendation on the setting up of an Electoral Offences Commission. We have observed that our elections are always accompanied by violence, whether before the elections or after. What has happened during and after the conduct of the last elections was really sad.

From another perspective, Awowole-Browne (2011) argued that 2011 general elections were cosmetic credibility. Election observers claim that the elections were devoid of fraud and other forms of malpractices. This could be so in some state capitals where they concentrated their observation exercises. According to him, what took place in rural polling environments were nothing different from the scenario in the 2003 and 2007 elections. There were several cases of multiple thumb printing, ballot box stuffing, compromises by electoral and security officers and misconduct by the dominant political parties. In other words, elections were heavily rigged in rural areas of Nigeria. Some opposition political parties especially the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) have contested the result of the presidential election as announced by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). It is as a result of this that in its letter to INEC, the CPC alleged that the report received from their field agents revealed that the conduct of the presidential election conducted on 16th April, 2011 especially in the South-South and South-Eastern part of Nigeria were not done in substantial compliance with the principle of the Electoral Act 2010, with the effect that the results handed down were substantially affected by massive irregularities such as multiple thumb printing, voter intimidation, over-voting, alien-voting and proxy voting (Awowole-Browne, 2011:5).

The ruling PDP maintained its dominant position in Nigerian politics in the 2011 elections, retaining the Presidency, a majority of the seats declared, to date, in the National Assembly, and a majority of the gubernatorial posts and state assemblies. The two main opposition parties, the CPC and the ACN, made some significant regional gains, however. The ACN dominated the

state elections in the southwest, where the PDP retained a majority in only one of the state assemblies and no longer holds any gubernatorial positions. Incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan won 59.6% of the presidential vote, taking a majority of the votes cast in 23 states and gaining enough support nationwide to avoid a run-off. His closest competitor, General Buhari, followed with 32.3% of the votes, taking the lead in one-third of the states, notably, those in the north. The ACN's Nuhu Ribadu came in third with 5.5% of the votes.

The United States government comments on the conduct of the 2011 elections have been largely positive. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton (2011) stated that "This historic event marks a dramatic shift from decades of failed elections and a substantial improvement over the 2007 election", but noted that "while this election was a success for the people of Nigeria, it was far from perfect". Also, the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Johnnie Carson has called the polls "the most successful elections since (Nigeria's) return to multiparty democracy, ... despite some technical imperfections," and has argued that "this reverses a downward democratic trajectory and provides the country a solid foundation for strengthening its electoral procedures and democratic institutions". It is as a result of the credibility of 2011 general election that prompted President Obama called to congratulate President Jonathan after his declaration as the winner of the 2011 presidential election, stating that "the success of the elections was a testament to Nigerian voters who...were determined that these elections mark a new chapter in Nigerian history" (quoted in Ploch, 2011).

In other words, domestic pressures combined with international factors and influences, to facilitate the conduct of relatively free and fair elections in Nigeria in April 2011. The formidable challenge remaining to be addressed is how to continue to bring further improvements to the electoral process and prevent a reversal to the old order of chaotic, undemocratic and violent elections, with the attendant negative consequences of authoritarian bad governance, instead of desirable good, democratic governance

CONCLUDING REMARKS:

The main thesis in this paper is that Nigeria's twelve-year old democratization is faltering. Rather than maturing with time, the country's fourth democratic experience has continuously shown

evidences of a possible relapse into its immediate past autocratic experience. Although the most recent electoral exercise in the country, the April/May 2011 general elections, showed elements of improvement and possibly restoration of hope in the democratization process, other aspects of public life such as political violence and corruption still constitute great threats. Obviously, the initial high hopes and expectations could have been sustained and probably have led to democratic consolidation if the autonomy and functionality of the modern state and its agencies had been strengthened in contemporary Nigeria (Yagboyaju, 2011).

In Nigeria's quest to consolidate democracy, there should exist strong opposition party or bodies. In Liberal democracies, opposition parties put constructive pressure on the ruling political party and serve a watch-dog role. It is unfortunate that the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), the ruling party in Nigeria has been hostile to opposition parties, mass media and civil society organizations. To command loyalty from opposition parties or critics, they have resorted to using appointment to break the ranks of other political parties. When these men from opposition parties held such appointments, they find it hard to resist the lure of carpet-crossing the ruling party (Epia 2003: 11; Obia 2006).

The primary challenge of electoral reform re-INEC, is to reinforce the electoral umpire to enable it grow from a commission to an institution with the ability for long term planning rather than ad hoc reactions to events external to it. In the larger polity, there is a crying need for a rigorous debate on the necessary and sufficient conditions for electoral reforms and the joint role of both the institutions of government and civil society in making this possible. The challenge of electoral democracy in Nigeria lies in the recognition of the critical role that civil society and the political class holds in ensuring both free and fair elections, and accountability in government. The institutions of government like INEC, important as they maybe, merely reinforce this role. What this immediately suggests is the joint role of all stakeholders, where effective performance of one facilitates the performance of the other. The failures we so readily assign to INEC are at worst equal and proportional to the failures of all other stakeholders in our political landscape.

In order to enable INEC to operate effectively without perception of dependence on the Executive, INEC's financial resources should be fully independent from the Executive. This can be assured by making INEC revenue a first line charge on the Consolidated Revenue Fund. Given the problems reported with the voters register, INEC should take additional steps to

improve the quality of the register. This includes providing full opportunity for citizens to register and to make corrections to their personal data, greater efforts to distribute Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) in a timely and efficient manner, and full public outreach efforts to explain the continuous registration process.

There is need to reduce the materialized nature of Nigerian politics if the country want to attain consolidated democracy. It is true that the financial stakes in an election these days have gone to the level that only those who have tasted power previously or work in the government for so many years and accumulate more money are capable of backing their political claims. From 1999 to 2011, we witnessed politicians claimed to have mapped out billions of Naira (Nigerian Currency) on elections. These billions will be spent in order to win election at all cost.

While Nigerian domestic election monitors must make allowance for imperfections associated with developmental challenges in assessing the credibility of elections, deliberate manipulation and fraudulent abuse of the Constitution and the electoral process designed to produce results not in consonance with the constitution and international standards must never be accepted. Building an efficient electoral system that accurately reflects the will of Nigerians is not rocket science. Simple technology exists to accurately capture, collate and record the will of Nigerians in a manner that nullifies multiple voting, ballot stuffing and thuggery, and forces politicians to actually campaign for votes and earn the peoples mandate.

Party primaries should be held in a fully democratic manner, in order to promote internal party democracy, and parties should not substitute candidates who have won party primaries legitimately. Parties should promote non-violence and denounce the use of intimidation and hate-speech. They should also fully train and support their polling agents and establish effective reporting mechanisms.

Consolidating democracy and ensuring credible elections in Nigeria requires building the institutional capacity of the electoral commission, comprehensive and broad based electoral framework as well as controlling the level of violence through a framework that would give responsibility to all stakeholders with radical reprimand for failure.

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