

Independent National Electoral Commission (Inec) And Elections In Nigeria: An Assessment Of 1999-2014 Elections

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Abstract

The paper investigated the activities of the electoral body (INEC) and other Stakeholders in the conduct of elections in Nigeria from 1999 to 2014. The electoral body has the constitutional mandates to conduct elections. It does not do this alone; other stakeholders had been involved in different capacities. Security Operatives, Political Parties, Orientation Agency, Tribunals/Judicial System, others are Election Observers, Civil Society and ad hoc Staff. They functions vis-a-vis their attitudes make or mar the credibility of the elections as seen in the past and recent elections conducted since 1999. The study adopted qualitative method in its investigation and used content analysis and narrative analytical techniques in the analysis of data. The data was sourced through the use of secondary method, magazines, newspapers, internet, journals etc. The elite theoretical framework was adopted since, they take electoral decisions. The study revealed that electoral body and stakeholders refused to adhere to the rules of the democratic game. The study recommended that the electoral body and stakeholders should adhere to the rules of game to earn credibility and enhance public confidence. The study advocated for 4 year jail term for electoral criminals.

Keywords: Election; Electoral Body; Agency; Organization and Rules.

Introduction

Elections involve various types of issues and activities and in other to conduct free, fair and credible elections various agencies or organizations are used. These activities are expected to be strictly implemented by the electoral body to achieve the targeted objectives as enshrined in the nation's electoral acts and constitution. This electoral body, agencies and organizations include; Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), security agents, political parties, judicial system, orientation agency, stakeholders (politicians), electoral observers, civil society etc. It was expected that the collective responsibilities of these bodies or agencies in performing their duties diligently without bias during conduct of elections as umpire produces free, fair and credible elections in Nigeria or anywhere in the world.

Electoral irregularities had been experienced in the past and present in Nigeria. These agencies in most cases refused to play the game according to the rules and regulations. The critics and electoral analysts have adduced various factors attributed to this electoral quagmire in the country. These factors include; corruption, inefficiency of the agencies, lack of funds, inadequate personnel, unqualified personnel, ethnic consciousness, and religious differences, electoral frauds, for example fake registration of voters, bribery during voting, ill political connivance, lack of competence, stuffing/ snatching of ballot boxes, for example. Anambra Gubernatorial race on November 16, and INEC was accused of political connivance, logistical mishaps, lack of trust, competent and independent. (Okocha, 2013).

Historically, elections violence, frauds, malpractices/irregularities, cheating are on increase and the sharp practices are taking a different dimensions. This ill wind is getting more hydra-headed in the nation political system. These ugly trends had made elections to be a business as usual. Elections in Nigeria had been a time the political system is being heated with all manner of challenges which include, labour unions' strikes, political labeling, frequent cross carpeting by political class, personality clash of interests, killings, fighting/boxing in legislatives houses, looting of government treasury, forgery and fanning embers of ethnic/primordial interests or sentiments in the country.

The administration of Abdusalami Abubakar on 11 August, 1998, gave birth to Independent National Electoral Commission with the Decree 11 of 1998.(Cornelius, 2012) The legal existence of the commission was incorporated into 1999 constitution which became operational on May 29, 1999. (Constitution,1999). With the prefixed, 'independent' previously such commissions like Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO), National Electoral Commission (NEC), and National Electoral Commission of Nigeria,(NECN) ,do not have in their names .The brain behind the idea of prefix was as a result of the desire and determination to have a free and fair elections that the electoral commission will be free from undue control and direction of any authority in the exercise of her constitutional roles/responsibilities in its powers and functions accordingly.

Surprisingly, the change in the nomenclature has not caused any appreciable change in the status and characters of the electoral commission. The odds of electoral irregularities still rare its ugly head at a very high percentage in the country's electoral process. The intimidation and manipulation of the commission by both the party in power and ruling government is the rule rather than the exception.

Obviously, the electoral fraud is now becoming more hydra-headed and sophisticated against the primary objectives for which the commission was formed. The commission is formed to conduct and address the anomalies or pitfalls that characterized the conduct of elections in achieving free and fair elections for good governance in the country. Examples abound, in 2003, the European union observed thus, that elections were marred by serious' electoral frauds in Cross River, Delta ,Edo,Enugu, Imo, Kaduna, Rivers ,Abia, Anambra, Benue, Ebonyi, Katsina and Nassarawa states (EMG, 2003). The results in cases above were grossly manipulated by some electoral officers and party officials at different collation centers.

The nature of the irregularities include forgery of results, snatching and stuffing of ballot boxes, multiple voting, falsification of results sheets. It cautioned that elections in these states lack credibility and appropriate measures must be taken to provide voters with truly democratic electoral process.

Although, the commission is portrayed to be autonomous, it is in reality a quasi-autonomous body till date. Its dependent nature on the executive as encapsulated in the constitution clearly under this section 154(1) of the 1999 constitution for instance expressly confers to the power to appoints the chairman, commission members, and the resident electoral commissioners from the states and federal capital Territory on the President and its funding. Constitution, (1999). This undue interference was noticeable in all the elections under review that gave the ruling party Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), opportunity over other political parties.

Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) came into existence in 1998 after the exit of such previous commissions and long rule military for decades. The commission has conducted elections from 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011-2014. It is now preparing for 2015 general elections. The dishearten thing in the elections conducted by the commission for over 14 years is that, the commission is still claiming to be learning their huge lessons. According to the Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Prof. AttahiruJega, said, “the commission had learnt its lessons with the outcome of the November 16, 2013 governorship election in Anambra State” (Okocha, 2013:12). The INEC Boss, also declared “that subsequent elections in the country would be devoid of the irregularities that marred the state governorship election that eventually resulted in a supplementary election on November 30, 2013. (Okocha, 2013:13).

Jega also claimed that, the commission had learnt huge lessons from what happened in the Anambra state, stating that concerted efforts are being put in place to ensure that such does not repeat both in the Ekiti and Osun States governorship elections in 2014 as well as the much talked about 2015 general elections.” (Okocha, 2013:13). The lessons from previous elections and that of Anambra state were not even enough to correct irregularities in Ekiti and Osun elections as claimed by INEC boss. For example, “Ekiti election was fraudulent” (Bamidele, 2014:1). **Mr. Rauf Aregbesola, faulted the Ekiti governorship election on June 23, 2014 which saw People Democratic Party candidate Fayose emerged as winner, calming that All Progressives Congress lost the Ekiti State governorship elections due to fraud and irregularities.** (Bamidele, 2014).

Then, judging from the past experiences, the 1999 elections after military had seized power for over three decades the outcome of the election was rated as relatively peacefully, but not free from election irregularities. Though, it gave birth to the nascent democracy and recorded massive participation.

The 2003 election was civilian to civilian elections not only that the elections were marred by frauds/ irregularities and witnessed late registration of voters by Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). It brought condemnation to Nigerians. As it was rated below minimum standard for conducting elections anywhere in the world (Nwoba, 2013). The 2007 elections that brought late Yar’dua into power was worst as the late President admitted that the election that

brought him into power was marred by electoral irregularities and opted for electoral reform to address the anomalies.

In 2011, the appointment of Prof Jega, as the chairman of the commission raised the hope of Nigerian but all to no avail as the incumbent government recorded selections and imposition of candidates through manipulations of elections results in their favour. The case in point is the inconclusive election in Anambra State in 16th November. 2013 (Agency report, 2013).

The multi-million dollar question, bordering the minds of every Nigerian come 2015 elections would be; could the commission deliver free, fair and credibly elections devoid of frauds/irregularities? Now, Prof, Jega has started apologizing for administration inefficiency in the commission. For example Jega admitted that one of his officials sabotaged the election in some parts of the state but the sabotage was not enough to cancel the whole election in just concluded guber race in Anambra State.(Agency report, 2013). The continuous voter's registration and delimitation of constituencies are inconclusive including the problem of voter's apathy and multiple registrations.

In Anambra State, lack of enthusiasm and emotional emptiness were highly noticed, for example, youth were seen playing football at central school Nkpor, traders were engaged in business in AlorNkpor Market, and in some polling units voters turn out was less than 10 per cent. The stale chairman of PDF (Ken Emeakayi in Anambra complained bitterly over the low turnout of voters (Agency, 2013). Therefore, many challenges are still needed to be factored by the commission to avoid its integrity being eroded.

Obviously, all the lessons the commission has learnt should be factored into the preparation for the 2015 general elections, to make it successful and credible. Since, the present rating of the commission is very low in election management (Iluyemi, 2013).

Independent National Electoral Commission (Inec) And Election Stakeholders

Theoretical Discuss

Before the elections the electoral commission met with different stakeholders; Security Agencies, Political Parties, Electoral Observers, Judicial System, Religious Bodies, Ad hoc Staff, Civil Society, Traditional Rulers, Community Leaders, and as a way of creating awareness and preaching free and fair elections. The aim was to ascertain opinions on how to tackle challenges confronting the commission. The commission organizes seminars/workshops for its management (Okocha, 2013).

Security Agencies

The security agencies include; state security Service (SSS), police, the army, civil defense, and other paramilitary with the mandate to assist the INEC to conduct free and fair elections in the

country. The security agencies on electoral duties have a responsibility of ensuring that peaceful conditions are maintained at the polling and counting centers during elections.

The security agents also protect citizen's to exercise their franchise, without fear of coercion, intimidation, violence, manipulation. Other duties and responsibilities in the poll before and during poll are; alertness, approachability, maintenance of impartiality, fairness, use of force when necessary to restore peace and order. They communicate with their superior and commanders during elections, awareness of electoral law, reporting, cooperation, and collaboration to achieve free and fair elections Cleen, (2011).

The presence of security agencies during elections are also meant to avert any possible occurrence of human rights abuses. But invariably the expectation of an ordinary Nigerian to that regard is the prophetic bible injunction that it easy for camel to pass through an eye of a needle, than a rich man to enter into heaven. This assertion holds firmly because the security agencies are eating the bones they are suppose to guide and protect jealously. Hence, the present rancor and insecurities in the process of protecting our nascent democracy during elections in the country.

These evils were perpetuated in collaboration with the government spies or agents to dominate their political opponents. They liaise with those in corridor of power to oppress their political enemies by playing politics of bitterness, unfair, fraternization, highhandedness that are politically motivated and through other various sharp practices /irregularities. For example, in 1999, showed a case of gory fraud committed at amidst of security agents. The 1999 Presidential Election total votes cast was 29,484,441 and with the power of incumbency to make it look credibly, raised it to 42,018,735, but in content for two presidential aspirants the total votes casted for Obasanjo was 18,738,154,(62.85%) and OluFalae, 11,110,287(37.22%) (INEC, 1999).

But when the members of presidential candidates went up to 20 in two presidential elections 2003, and 2007 respectively, Obasanjo in the midst of growing disaffection against these poor performance of People Democratic Party (PDP), led government, personality clashes and acrimonious among membership still went ahead to appropriate 24,109,159 votes representing 61.80 per cent of the total votes casted TMG, (2007). Other parties were allotted votes in varying degrees in accordance with the whims caprices of the electoral bodies with guidance of security agents. Presidential candidates like late chief Ikemba Odumegwu Ojukwu, Chief Jim Nwobodo, Gani Fawehimi, Kalu Idike, and others are seriously beaten by the ruling party in their different states of the federation in a bid to win by the ruling party at the detriment of others (TMG, 2007).

Political Party

On November 13, 2012 the Chairman of Independent National Electoral Commission, Prof. Attahiru Jega said, "that political parties connives with some of the commission's officials and security agencies to corrupt the electoral process and rig the elections" (Ikem, 2012: 14). Jega, "accused the political parties on how they budget for INEC officials and some security agencies to tamper with the outcome of polls". He made the assertion during roundtable conference on party politics, agents in what could be termed cash and cany democracy, all in a bid to win. He

also noted that squabble and other corrupt tendencies that rock the political parties is as a result of lack of internal democracy all are cause by the political stakeholders. And wondered why political parties that supposed to entrench democratic governance and national development by its status and character, derail the electoral process (Ikem, 2012).

According to Ekweremadam, their philosophies and manifestos are the fulcrum around which politicking should resolve' (Ikem, 2012). Since, parties are the vehicle by which elected leaders, including the legislative got to office they can be rightly described as the spring source. Unfortunately, our political class or elites that has the solemn duty of ensuring that Nigeria robust democratic institution develop with sustainable confidence in our electoral and justice systems, turned to discredit the fragile democracy through electoral sharp practices, full of corrupt tendencies as parties are often driven by internal convulsion, lack of core discipline and a glaring absence of internal democracy and rule of law. The election conducted by political parties, based on electoral reform act/ constitution are yet to address the pitfalls in the electoral process aimed at achieving good governance and protecting National interest (Ikem, 2012).

The sustainability of the nascent democracy is largely dependent on the political parties, impartiality, discipline, buoyant ideas of visionary leaders. The spirit of allowing for equal level play ground, free of impurities and ardent observers of their own rules. The rule of law against the recent frauds/irregularities that developed in our electoral process of democratization is the answers to genuine electoral system (Ikem, 2012). The debate in Anambra Gubernatorial race which was pruned from 27 aspirants to 4 would have been a welcome development to the fledgling democracy if competent, independent and trustworthy are inherent in the electoral commission (Akinoye, 2013).

Over the years, the so called awareness claimed to have been created by the commission both present and past seems to be a mirage or jamboree, A part from the huge amount spent on the process, reasonable percentage of uniformed electorates in the hinterland were not reached thereby subverting and denying them political education. The attempt to correct these anomalies by different commissions failed because of lack of transparency and hidden interests of the ruling government and members of the commission in the country.

This hopeless situation made a political analyst and resident of Anambra State in Gubernatorial race on 16, November 2013 in Anambra, Ugu chukwudi to assert that, "Voter registration and sensitization in the state prior to the elections were greatly mismanaged," that, "Emphasis was more on security than the actual election, INEC seemed confused amongst the multitude of difficulties."(Okocha 2013:2).

In the same vein, the candidates of PDP's Nwoye in Anambra state election, made similar allegations of deliberate INEC foul play, claiming that, "the election had been heavily manipulated by INEC in collusion with security agents in favour of Governor Peter Obi's preferred candidate, Willie Obiano" (Okocha, 2014:4). Bamdiele, (2014), the governorship aspirant in a rally in Osun state pleaded with the voters to go the poll with charms and bible all in bid to win election.

Electoral Observers

In very democratic process of consolidation one of the vital fundamental human rights of eligible voters is citizen participation. This voter's right is exercised during elections. The previous elections and the recent ones both the foreign and local observers of non-government organizations came for the elections. The primary aim is expose the electoral loopholes and comment on any positive improvement, e.g. civil society, are seriously involved in monitoring elections to ensure that the right of electorates are protected from abuses and to inform the entire world how transparent the processes were without bias.

“The observers opined that the mere presence of electoral observers can ensure a free and fair elections, it also gives credibility to the elections to the international community”(Ujo, 2000:12). Several electoral observes of either foreign or local monitoring groups have made different comments of various magnitude concerning process of elections conducted in Nigeria since, 1999 till date. The reports or rating is primarily aimed at ensuring free, fair and credible elections. The reports available since, 1999 elections showed that over 85% were negative scoring the electoral system below pass mark as a result of electoral frauds which were on increase instead of declining as new methods of sharp practices are being discovered in an every election (TMG, 2011).

In the recent election in Anambra, the transition monitoring group (TMG)), for example, decried serious shortcomings in the poll and reported that at on the day of voting around 60% of polling units had still not received the necessary election materials. | A good number of voters, including the People's Democratic Party's (PDF) candidate for the governorship, Tony Nwoye – complained that they couldn't find their names on the register despite the fact they had valid voter cards. Nwoye claimed that over 30% of his supporters had the same problem” (Akinloye, 2013).

In 2003, European Union reported with evidence that, certain states particularly in Cross River, Delta, Enugu, Imo, Kaduna and Rivers, had widespread of elections fraud. The elections in these states lack credibility and appropriate measures must be taken to provide voters with truly democratic electoral process (Olukotun, 2003).

In another development in 2003 general elections Transition Monitoring Group (TMG 2003), observed thus; “Some of the activities organized by the electoral commission preparatory to the elections such as the voter's registration, the registration of political parties and the display of the voters list were marred by inefficiency, confusion, and corruption. Hundreds of thousands of prospective voters could not register in the voters registration exercised by the commission. ...claimed that they did not have enough registration materials” (Sha.2003:8).

Actually, voting itself during all the elections were reportedly marked by disruption of polls or absence of elections in some polling centers, vote buying, stealing of ballot boxes, improper set up and voting procedures, multiple ghost voters, and underage voting...collaboration of INEC officials to commit electoral frauds, absence of polling officials units, and intimidation of election observers...(Sha, 2003). In 1999, 2003, 2007, and 2011 the

observations were not far from the above as members like Niger Delta militants in the South-South, Kidnapping mostly in South East, and Boko Haram in the North-East were all fallout from political thuggery during and after elections in the country in some cases.

Judicial System

The Nigeria Judiciary is too weak to bring expected justice and fair play to the hope of a common man. Since, corrupt officers are handled with directives from government corners, and Judicial officers solely depend on the whims and caprices of their master (executives and legislatures), cannot bring justice to bear in the nascent democracy (Nwoba, 2013).

This reluctance and frequent adjournments in delivering genuine judgments gave room for manipulations of tribunal judgments or rule by courts of law as experienced in different administration in the country. Since, manipulators will eventual get away from it. Femi (2013:21), observed that, “the ruling class has corrupted the judiciary...as there is abuse of the concept of plea bargaining” To support it further, Dokubo (2013) said, that Nigeria Judiciary is evil” Elections in Nigeria had suffered immeasurable injustice from the hands of judges from courts of law and election tribunals in the country.

Youth Corpsers

The National Youth Service Corps had been integrated into conduct of the elections to offer ad hoc services during elections. The aim was to use people from different cultural and religious background to deliver the mandates of the commission. It is a welcome development as it helps to reduce the problem of qualified manpower during elections. Though, the good intention in some cases were dashed to the dust when some members of the NYSC join the band wagon to derail the trust and faith reposed on them by participating in different forms of cheating and election manipulations to get their share of the National cake (Nwoba, 2013). This led electoral observers to advice INEC to take caution in the recruitment of the ad hoc staff in the just concluded governorship poll in Anambra State.

Religious Organizations and Elections

It is now becoming an annual ritual for different religious organizations, both Christians and Muslim to fix a prayer summit for non- violence elections in Nigeria. The main objective of the summit, according to the organization is a call for divine intervention to conduct free, fair and credible elections. It is the belief of religious worshippers that prayers will facilitates elections free of rancor, calamity, and sustain peaceful atmosphere. It will prevent loss of life and property, and waste of scares resources. The purpose in mind is encouraging but caution should be exercised to avoid it's been politicized.

Theoretical framework Elite theory

The Theory is associated with works of Gaetano Mosca, it believed that power has its source and flows from political and bureaucratic organizations ruled by minorities. Where democracy becomes the rules of an organized minorities (Johanri, 2012). The organized ruling minorities play the pipe and dictates the tune. They appoint leaders of the commissions, agencies, finance, undue control, manipulates their activities to detriments of the owners of the property, 'the ruled'. The inability of the commission to conduct free, fair and credible election is to protect selfish interest of the minority 'Elite Class' that governed and sustain them in corridor of power.

Methodology

The study adopted qualitative method in its investigation and used content analysis and applied narrative analytical techniques. The data was sourced through secondary source, documentaries, archives; textbooks, journals, library materials, internet materials, magazines, newspapers, International election observersreports, legal documents, government official documents, and INEC documentaries. Political parties and other stakeholder's documents.

Findings

- The electoral body is ineffective and dependent and could not conduct free, fair and credible elections since 1999-2014. Prof. Attahiru Jega apologized to the world for inability of the commission to conduct free, fair, and credible election in governorship election in Anambra State in 2014.
- The constitutional roles/responsibilities of the President to appoint the Chairman of the Commission create room for undue influence.
- The corrupt electoral offenders are not punished according to rule of law rather are treated with lip service.
- Voting in Nigeria is now for the political class not for the common man.
 - Selection of candidates by political cables is the new democratic order in practice called 'sole candidate'.
- Many of the stakeholders are rich with massive proceeds from electoral malpractice practices and partners in crime.
- The heterogeneous nature of the country makes Nigeria not to be a nation but in the process of being a nation creates problem of rigging during conduct of elections.
- The conduct of elections has encountered lack and misappropriation of funds and fake/inflated contracts of electoral materials which frustrate elections plans and put its credibility in doubts.
- The rate of political education/awareness and actual participation in voting in the country is very low.
- Rotational governance in the six geopolitical zones in the country should be constitutional.

- Database of the electoral commission should be made accessible to the Nigerian citizens.

Recommendations

- The commission would perform credibly, if given free hands to operate and to adhere to the rules of the democratic game.
- The appointment of the Chairman of the Commission should be ratified by both the National Assembly and State Houses of Assembly in the country.
- The electoral offenders should be punished according to the rule of the law and not lip service.
- Voting should not only be for the elites but also for the common man to exercise their franchise independently.
- Election of candidates should prevail and not selection for the election to be credible free and fair.
- The electoral stakeholders that amassed wealth from electoral fraud should face 4 year jail terms.
- The Nigerian citizens should live above sentiments and accommodate the differences to have formidable nation and stop rigging of elections.
- The problem of misappropriation and lack of funds could be corrected by appointing credible leaders.
- The rate of political education/participation could be increased by continuous awareness not during elections period.
- The dangers of electoral irregularities should be exposed by including it in primary and secondary school curriculum.
- Rotational governance should be encouraged in lieu of the six geo-political zones in the country to reduce taking sides by the commission members.
- Database of the commission should be created and made accessible to the citizen.

Conclusion

It had been showed clearly, that the electoral acts and the commission that conduct elections in the country were made to change government from one administration to the other. The primary objective saddled with their mandates is to conduct free and fair elections in the country. The chains of failures recorded by the commission over times were highly anchored on manipulations either from the parties, ruling government or the commission.

Since, the election could not be conducted by commission only, other agencies collaborates illegally to soil their hands. These attitudes turns the commission to toothless bull dog that bark but cannot bites. Therefore, all hands must be on deck to have viable, effective and efficient electoral body. This will help the commission to stand the test of time and deliver her constitutional mandates in the country's electoral system.

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