

Elections Without Electorate: Perspective on 2003/2007 Elections

E. M. Ushie
&
Victor B. Ekanem

Abstract

The electoral process is an ideal and integral part of the democratic process, whether in developed or developing societies. However, judging from its use and abuse in Nigeria and in most third world countries in general within and between parties; in primary and actual elections or selections, has negatively influenced the enthronement of democratic process as far as free and fair elections are concerned. Several elections conducted in Nigeria have often than not been seen as a charade that has failed to strengthen democratic ethos in the polity. The process and organization of the elections are often carried out consciously or unconsciously without the cooperation of the electorates who are suppose to determined who rule them. This scenario has always replayed itself in Nigeria electoral process that such elections have been seen and described as mere 'selection' process. Therefore the purpose of this paper is to examine the elections without electorate with perspective on 2003/2007 elections in Nigeria.

Introduction

Elections could be seen as institutionalized procedures for the choosing of office holders by some or all the recognized members of a society. So an electoral system exists to provide the electorate with opportunity and the right to choose their representative and maintain contact with them. Hence, for an electoral system to be democratic, it must provide for equal

electorate and the freedom by that electorate to make a real and meaningful choice devoid of coercion or intimidation (Eminue 2001). In effect, 'election would be deemed to be democratic and hence good if it is free and fair and not based on patronage of any kind'.

Therefore, elections in Nigeria though seen as a means of controlling the government; within context of electorates participation reveal a rather disturbing 'state', that has called for serious concern. Aihe (1988) noted that, indeed the Nigerian electoral process since independence has gained an unevitable reputation for fraudulent practices. (In Duru 2002). This situation has forced many to see elections in Nigeria as a mirage or a mere 'selection'; selection in the sense that the electorate are left out of the entire system, owing to the fact that elections are conducted with or without the full participation of the electorate, who are supposed to choose those who rule over them. The organization of elections in Nigeria have often been carried out without due involvement of the people. The system operates in a way that suggests a total disregard and misapplication of democratic ethos. Thus, the outcome has always been manipulated in favour of candidates of the powerful few. This is unfair and shameful, given the democratic system we opted for. It better telling the people that the leaders would be 'selected' so that they would not bother to queue up in the scorching sun. But allowing them to vote and later turning things upside down is the height of betrayed that must be resisted.

Conceptual Clarification

Electoral system is a process by which citizens of a given democratic entity elect representative to handle their machinery of government. This is done through vote casting.

According to Deverger, M. (1958), electoral system is only one factor in the evolution of a party system, but the effects of different electoral system can be found in the structure, ideology, the pattern of the party interaction and the members of the parties that compete in the political system. An electoral system consists of more than the method of counting votes cast by the voters. A full description of an electoral system would include such factors as the extent of franchise that is, who is entitled to vote? It would include the rules relating to the candidates and parties, and those regulating the administration of election, especially the provision against corruption.

Roberts (1971), electoral system is the institutionalized arrangements by means of which an election is conducted and the purpose of the election fulfilled. The term, according to Hague and Harrop (1982) covers the legal and practical realities of voter registration and election administration as well as the prices rule for translating.

Election

Scruton (1983), election is the process whereby an electorate chooses, by voting, officers either to act on its behalf or represent it in an assembly with a view to governing or administering. An electorate refers to a class of citizens entitled (by a law course) to vote in an election, by whatever procedure.

Elections provide for a bare minimum of political participation, perhaps the only act of participation for the vast majority of the governed, and therefore create a feeling of belonging and a degree of responsibility for government decisions.

An Overview of the Electoral System in Nigeria

A survey of Nigeria's electoral system (process) has increasingly revealed an important point of concern. This is sequel to the fact that the electoral system rather than provide expected results as become a misnomer and an episode that could be term a farce. From 1959-2007 elections the system as gradually move from a falling system to a failed system, worse still the system recently has deepen its fraud 'characteristics and further increased it sophistication in rigging, that the survival and endurance of our democracy is highly questioned. The electoral regulatory bodies instead of abating electoral fraud have join with the so called ruling party to disfranchise the electorate. In short, the have help institutionalized electoral crime in the polity. Indeed, characteristically, electoral system particularly in 2003/2007 as been seen as charade. 'The magnitude of fragrant and deliberate abused of electoral process especially by people in power is clear'. The elections were flawed from inception to execution, lacked the corolaries that can produce genuine results that could be respected by observers and all the contending parties.

Pa Enahoro speaking on April polls remarked: At this point in our history, we must all do away with emotions on the current grave issues confronting the country. For over 35 years, our country was run like a vehicle with a drunken driver loaded with reckless passengers urging the

driver on. The end needless to say has been the disastrous elections in which we find ourselves today.

Political Parties Election System

Political party remain an integral part of any electoral process be it in developed or developing countries. Political party is an association of individuals that engages in electoral and other competitions with its counterpart(s) for the control of the personnel and the administration of government. Thus, parties are described as “political machines for fighting election”.

Looking at the position of political party and elections certain things come to mind. In the 2003/07 elections the role of political parties, is obvious. Political parties served as vehicles through which candidate are filled in for election and thus ensuring the survived of democracy in any nation. The overwhelming position of political party on any democracy reveal it vitality, as far as democracy is concern. Therefore, political party irrespective of their typed have certain features in common; they are hierarchically organized; they are programmatic (they always have “action plans” for promoting the general welfare and ushering on the good life for all), and they recruit personnel for the government (Eminue 2001); it appear indispensable in modern government. Ball (1986:75), submit that; political parties exist in different form in various political systems, and while not essential to the political process. It is difficult to imagine the political consequences of their absence in the vast majority of states.

In the same vain Encyclopedia Britannica (1980) noted that no modern democracy could function without parties, the oligarchchal tendencies of which are best regarded as a necessary evil. (In Agi 2006).

In Nigeria the political party remains the soul of the political system. The country in 2003/07 election opted for a multi-party system. Presently, we have over 30 political parties, which include PDP, AC, ANPP, PPA, LP etc. their performance in the just concluded elections shows the domination of one political party that is the PDP in elect ions. This has instigated problem, court cases and other crisis in the polity. PDP have been adjudge as hijacking the elections through rigging, intimidation, used of force-the police, the army and the undue control of INEC. Hence many have vehemently declared PDP has the problem of Nigeria’s democracy.

It is clear that political party greatly play an important part in the political system of any given society. Their efficiency tends to guarantee a

sound and effectiveness democracy by all means. But their activities in the 2003/07 elections have been a far cry from expectation, they have bastardized the electoral system. Their criminality is revealed in rigging, kidnapping, the used of money to influenced the electorates and the deployment of state power in hijacking power-especially the ruling party (PDP).

Electoral Body and the Electoral System

Without an effective electoral body to serve as an unbiased umpire in an election such electoral system cannot thrive or survive. The life of a democracy depends on the type of electoral body put in place. It is believed that electoral body should be able, on the face of a democratic system provide for a free and fair election. An election where the electorate are allow to cast their vote and the materials for the election provided on time, devoid of intimidation, malpractices and falsification of results. The function of electoral body is central to the sustenance of democracy and the deepening of democratic principles and practice. For instance the activities of INEC in 2003/2007 elections can only be adjudge as providing a credible election based on it ability to conduct a free and fair elections, if such has ever existed in its history. It inability to give Nigeria a free and fair elections and the undue influence by politician via the ruling party suggest it lack of independent. Independent which is a major feature of an effective electoral body is threaten here. The activities of politician and political parties in the polity at times have been overbearing on the INEC, leaving the electoral system to suffer serious drawn backs; then allowing for more questions than answers in the mouth of Nigerians.

Elections without Electorate with Perspective on 2003/07 Elections

With perspective on 2003/07 elections, one would hardly say that the electorates were fully involved in the electoral, system. A clear observation of the elections in question, reveal that there was no elections but mere 'selection' or what is term a charade in the name of election or selection continued at all levels even within the political parties. Several comment by well-meaning Nigerians, the press and public analyst strengthen this fact.

The outcome has always been manipulated in favour of candidates of the powerful few. This is

unfair and shameful, given the democratic system we have opted for. It is better telling the people that the leaders would be selected; so that they would not bother to queue up in the scorching sun. But allowing them to vote and later turn things upside down is the height of betrayal that must be resisted. If Nigerian leaders talk about lack of patriotism and sabotage, they are to blame. An average Nigerian no longer can sing the National Anthem on request. This is because they are not proud of the system, and are not carried along in the scheme of things. When last did the government sincerely seek the people's opinion before making policies meant for their day-to-day living? Human society does not work that way if it does for a while, it would collapse one day! (Daily Independent May 9, 2007).

The comments on 2007 April polls suggest the position of electorate which have often been undermined in the electoral system.

Fawehimi condemned the elections, describing them as the worst in the nation's election history. Brazen and Bizarre corruption by highly-placed public officers at the federal and in the state levels, was responsible for the alleged unprecedented electoral robbing in the April elections.

The story remains that the people were disfranchised and the elections were hijacked to favour some candidates. The Scenario created by INEC and political parties especially PDP in conjunction with some power seeking politicians, is a sad one. Presiding officers at polling centres were after all deployed by PDP. In place like Calabar, here PDP was in charge of INEC materials distributing it via their 'machineries' the electorates only voted to exercise their right but the 'real' result was provided by the PDP who influenced everything to favour their candidates. Elections were an organized fraud or what I could term a mistake in a democracy. It can be envisaged that this is the worst election ever in the history of Nigeria, presided over by a civilian government and which will therefore lead to the worst dictatorship. If the fraudulent election is allowed to stand. This is an election that has further reduced our collective integrity in the eyes of the international community. In the words of European union election monitors, "the election were marred by poor organization, lack of essential transparency, widespread procedural

irregularities, significant evidence of fraud particularly during the result collation process voter disfranchisement at different stages of the process, lack of equal conditions for constants and numerous incidents of violence’ As if to add salt to injury, the Madeleine Albright led National Democratic institute (NDI) in another press statement described the elections as “a step backwards in the conduct of elections in Nigeria..... In all of the election that the NDI has observed in every region of the world such delay in the delivery of essential electoral materials and in opening polling sites is unprecedented”.

Definitely, both 2003/07 elections left the electorates out of it. It is rather sad that the electoral system did not support the electorates. Hence, a lot of things went wrong and the whole outcome of the elections was a mess. In many instances, there were no election result sheets and where there where, the results declared were at variance with the authentic results. Political agents, who were given copies of the result sheets, where there were results sheets, discovered that the results in the result sheets were at variance with the results as they know it. The situation is quite pathetic and calls for urgent change.

Conclusion

In short, the politics of electoral process in Nigeria has often operates in ‘absolute’ denial of the rights of the electorates who are supposed to choose those who rule them. Elections are regarded as mere ‘selection’ to favour the powerful few. There is absence of free and fair elections, as electorates are left out of the electoral system. The results of elections are often manipulated by INEC under the influence of the so called rulling party – PDP. The elections were characterized by several under aged voters, ballot bag snatching, state intimidation via armed forces and paramilitary agencies.

Therefore, the 2003/07 elections no doubt were not a true reflections of the wishes, desires, expectations and yearning of the people of Nigeria. The people are generally fed up with the prevailing scheme of things and they earnestly ask for a change to better their lots and give them a better life. ‘Nigeria is not a banana republic where anything can just happen’. Nigeria is governed by laws; hence, we should strive to strengthen constitutional democratic development, thereby ensuring enduring democracy in the polity.

Suggestions and Recommendations

This situation has left nothing to be desired of the system. The resultant effect is that democracy is threatened in Nigeria. And for democracy to endure they have to be political rebirth and the change of the belief of political parties and politicians who believed election is do or die affair. Political values and political culture of Nigeria should be reposition in a way that it will promise to strengthen democratic ethos. The electorates should be made to be beloved in the Nigerian project and see the Nation as theirs.

The role of the judiciary in deciding on election result though excellent; something should be done about it to allow the people to decide who rule them through their vote rather their wait for the judiciary to decide who win in the elections. This may result in a serious tyranny of the judiciary. This will help sustain our democracy.

INEC should be given independent to operate as an autonomous body free of undue interference from external sources.

- Adequate funds should be release in time to the electoral body for effective prosecution of election in a vast country like ours.
- The franchise of the electorate should be respected, uphold and strengthen in our democracy by our politicians, political parties and electoral body.
- Constitutional democratic development must be allowed to endure and honoured by the various actors in the electoral process or polity.
- For the sustenance of democracy, improvement of economic and social condition and the reduction of endemic poverty and deprivation should be seriously pursued. Therefore, economic empowerment of the electorates which could forestall the sale and disposition to sell their votes and/or voters cards for food is a must. According to Okoli (1990:169) the only safeguard against banality of the electoral process is an informed and vigilant electorate, confidents in it s duties, conscious of its rights and committed to the maintenance of a quality of life within the social political system.

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