

## DEMOCRACY, PARTY POLITICS AND GOOD GOVERNANCE: THE ROLE OF ELECTORAL MANAGEMENT BODIES IN NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

*Democracy has been accepted globally as the best form of government but the processes in Nigeria in recent time comes as a torn between opportunity and crisis because the crave for votes by political parties is characterized with high stakes for governance, security, economy, regional and religious bigotry. Though, the electoral umpire in Nigeria has been playing a significant role in democratic consolidation, good governance and vehicle for promoting sound and ethical democratic culture however, this is not without challenges. This research titled: Democracy, party, politics and good governance: The role of electoral management bodies in Nigeria, shall explore the conceptual view, realities and impact of democratic culture to the socio-economic development of Nigeria and the salient role of electoral umpire in Nigeria. The research shall explore relevant theoretical and empirical literature through the secondary sources. The paper concludes that electoral umpire has played a significant role in consolidating Nigerian democracy therefore recommends that democratic institution should be strengthened through adequate funding and independent of electoral umpire in Nigeria to promote democracy and good governance.*

**Keywords:** Democracy, Good Governance, Election, Electoral Management.

### INTRODUCTION

Democracy is the most acceptable form of government that guarantees the nation's growth and development (Zekeri, 2007). Therefore, its principles do not only need to be embraced to provide good governance, improved living standard, egalitarian society and equality among the citizenry but also serves as vehicle for sound, ethical and improved socio-economic and political consolidation of the nation. Nigerian political event as noted by Lauren (2015) has been characterized by ethnic, geographical and religious conflict thereby resulting to sharp division between the Muslim north and the Christian south, corruption and misrule which relegates the states authority and legitimacy. Surajudeen (2015) concludes that the pluralistic and multi-faceted nature of Nigerian society has further exposed it to unflinching aggravation, sentimental attributes and sectoral tendencies for electoral supports rather than good governance, democratic dividends and credibility of party candidates, for example, filling of candidates during presidential elections will be less tensed if the major political parties present candidates from the same geo-political zone as evidenced during the 1993 and 1999 presidential elections. Though, Akus (2012) observed that national integration in Nigeria is meant to promote unity and development of the nation but electoral process and democracy in Nigeria since Nigeria political independence has been seen as a fundamental weapon for sharing of national cake. More so, ethnicity and religion in Nigeria has been observed as the major challenges to Nigeria political fortunes as the political class has exploited ethnic and religious diversity to crave and canvass for political support thereby strengthening the polarization of electoral system along political line (Ringi, 2001).

The electoral process in Nigeria has been managed by several electoral commissions since 1960 to date and their functions is principally to organize, undertake and supervise all elections in Nigeria. Their functions no doubt contributes immensely to democratic consolidation and good governance in Nigeria but has been threatened with political interference, under-funding, irregularities and unstable institutional framework (Okoh, 2005, Okoye, 2007). This has posed serious challenge to the independence of electoral umpire, good governance and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Therefore, this paper shall critically appraise its effect and the way forward.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The scenario of party politics and regional politics and its effect on democratic sustainability has become an important national issue; this has generated a lot of actions, views, conceptual ideologies and reactions from different sections of the society. This according to Adibe (2015) has affected Nigeria's nascent democracy and the socio-political life of the citizenry as most Nigerians have a paradox opinion on the phenomenon and effects of party politics and regional politics in Nigeria. The Skeptism is based on the premise that this scenario is tantamount to transferring the action of governance to few political class who clamour for power as against national integration, good governance and merit system.

This challenges which supposed to be properly identified and aggressively tackled by the electoral bodies over the years has been characterized with several inadequacies thereby making it impossible for them despite the fact that democratic governance is a prerequisite for national development (Letswa, Egwemi 2013). It is therefore pertinent to examine the phenomenon of party politics, good governance and the role of electoral umpire in Nigeria through the following questions:

1. Has party politics help to improve democratic sustainability in Nigeria?
2. To what extent did regional and sectoral politics permeates the voting pattern of the citizens?
3. Has the electoral umpire play a significant role to democratic consolidation in Nigeria?

## **METHODOLOGY**

This paper explores the qualitative research method in its analysis. The paper attempts a theoretical and empirical view on democracy, party politics, good governance and the role of electoral management bodies in Nigeria. The activities of political parties, impact of democracy to the socio-economic lives of the citizens, effect of religion and sectoral affiliation to Nigeria's democracy and the composition, functions and challenges of electoral management in Nigeria shall be discussed. Finally, the findings of this paper shall help to give sound recommendation on how to ensure democratic culture and promote independence of electoral umpire and consolidation of democratic culture in Nigeria.

## **CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS**

The concept of democracy emanated from Greeks "demos" meaning people and "kratos" meaning power and government by the people. Therefore, democracy refers to government of the people, by the people and for the people (Ochala, 2009). Democracy is also seen as a political system of government in which all qualified adult citizens share the supreme power directly or through their elected representatives. Nnoonyelu (1998) sees democracy as a way of life that involves freedom to make choices about what one does, where he lives, how resources are allocated and utilized and the operations of institutions with a formalized pattern towards freedom of the citizens. Ojelabi and Babatope (2001) defined democracy as a system of government whereby the citizens exercise their governing power directly or through their representatives. The exercise of power directly by the citizens could be through participating in voting or other electoral process which indirectly could be taking decisions, voting or legislative processes through their elected representatives.

Linus (2009) view politics as a systematic study of political life, therefore, politics involves the authoritative allocation of values and resources of state to enhance the living standard of the citizens. More so, politics can be seen as the social process characterized with the art of influencing, manipulating and controlling others. Party politics as observed by Nwankwo (2001) is the politics engaged in by, expressed through the vehicle of and or considered from the ideal of political affiliations as opposed to national interest, whereas, Azeez (2009) concludes that party politics encompasses the activities of political parties through democratic architecture to dominate the polity through democratic institutions, while Attah, Audu and Haruna (2014) conclude that party politics means the integrated approach of formalized structure, institutionalized framework and the influence of the citizens political culture through party loyalty as opposed to national interest.

Election is the process of choosing electoral representatives or candidates through voting (Beetseh, 2008) whereas, good governance refers to a desirable social and political processes through responsible

leadership, accountability, selflessness, discipline, promotion of ethical norms and promotion of the citizens well-being (Jega, 1994). With the above conceptualization, it is clear that electoral bodies in Nigeria have a pivotal role to play in achieving sound democratic value in Nigeria.

### **PARTY POLITICS IN NIGERIA: A CHRONOLOGICAL OVERVIEW**

Nigeria as a nation has been faced with the scenario of party politics which promotes the political philosophies and consciousness of political party; this has traced its root from the first republic of Nigerian democratic development. From example, the political arrangement of Nigeria between 1962 and 1965 where the Northern People's Congress (NPC) needed a working alliance with other two political parties is a clear manifestation. More so, other political events such as the dismissal of Chief S. L. Akintola from Action Group, declaration of the state of emergency, the emergence of United Progressive Party in 1962 and the merging of United Progressive Party with some members of NCNC to form a new party Nigeria National Democratic Party (NNDP) in 1963 further buttress the assertion. In addition, following the transition programme of 1979, Moses (2002) observed that the Nigeria second republic had a keenly contested election with Alhaji Shehu Shagari becoming the duly elected President in 1979. The regime was characterized with social upheavals which led to the taking over of the government by the Buhari/Idiagbon regime in 1983. With the taking over of Buhari's government by General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida in 1985, the national electoral body conducted presidential election with Chief M.K.O. Abiola of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and Tofa Bashir of National Republican Convention (NRC) resulting to the annulment of the freest election by the National Electoral Commission Chairman, Mr. Humphrey Nwosu which led to another unstable democratic climate despite the clamour for democratic rule after long period of military rule in Nigeria.

In 1999, Nigeria returned to democratic rule with the keenly contested election by Chief Olusegun Obasanjo of People's Democratic Party (PDP) and Chief Olu Falae of Alliance for Democracy (AD) both from south-west Nigeria. Though, the filling of candidates by the two major political parties that contested the election was adduced from various quarters as an attempt to retain political power to the south-west resulting from the annulment of the June 12 1993 election, the attempt speaks volume of the reality of party politics, regional and sectoral interest in Nigeria. Since 1999 to date, the democratic processes had not been devoid of party and regional interest therefore, it has posed serious challenges to the development and sustainability of our democratic values and principles.

### **DEMOCRACY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES**

Ochalla (2009) argued that democracy allows people to choose and reject the leaders and their programmes when viewed to be no longer needed by the citizens. Though, Abraham Lincoln sees democracy as government by consent of the governed, its attributes and realities especially in developing nations is better imagined. Tunji (1997) and Idakpo (2007) outlined the fundamental features of democracy:

1. Popular sovereignty which is the ultimate political power that resides on the citizens.
2. There must be universal suffrage and majority rule.
3. There should be separation of powers within the various arms of governments to avoid authoritative tendencies.
4. There is fundamental human right of the citizens.
5. Human equality in the society which in political system every person must be granted equal rights and opportunity to pursue social status and material well-being.
6. There must be existence of political parties to engage in free and fair election.
7. The mass media is not tightly controlled by the government.
8. There is periodic election.

More so, Linus (2009) noted that democracy is categorized into the following:

**Direct Democracy:** This is a system in which the people assemble to take decision concerning the society and their well-being. Though, this system largely depends on the size of citizens and the time-frame.

**Indirect Democracy:** This is also called representative democracy; it is a process by which the people elect their representatives who thereby govern them indirectly.

Good governance according to United Nations Development Programme (1997) refers to the exercise of power through a country's economic, social and political institutions in which institutions represents the organizational rules, provide and protects the rights and wellbeing of the citizens. Nigeria democratic system has not been able to achieve this due to the following challenges:

- i. Weak institutional framework.
- ii. Regional and ethnic politics.
- iii. Weak judicial system and absence of clear policy implementation to ensure the independence of judiciary in political matters.
- iv. Underfunding of electoral bodies.
- v. Poverty and high level of illiteracy.
- vi. Lack of political education.
- vii. Political apathy and lack of electoral integrity.

### **THE ROLE OF ELECTORAL MANAGEMENT BODIES IN NIGERIA**

The electoral umpire in Nigeria is charged with the responsibility of managing elections and the body is perceived to be truly independent, transparent and impartial in the conduct of elections so as to create a level playing ground for all stakeholders in the electoral process. Adibe (2015) concludes that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has improved in its logistics and electoral process. Despite the challenges electoral umpire faced over the years, their significant role to consolidating Nigeria's democracy cannot be overemphasized.

The role of electoral management body as noted by Musa (2001), Okoh (2005) and Woleola (2015) include the following:

1. Management of all elections as may be provided for by the constitution, electoral Act or other laws of the country.
2. Registration of political parties in accordance with the provisions of the constitution or electoral Act.
3. Monitoring and supervision of the activities of political parties including funding and conduct of primaries.
4. Discipline of political parties and candidates that violates electoral laws.
5. Preparation, maintenance and update of voters register for the purpose of election.
6. Monitoring of political campaigns and provision of electoral guidelines for political parties, candidates and electorates.
7. Recruitment of ad-hoc staff for election purpose or other salient functions.
8. Assigning of functions and supervision to its employees or agents.
9. Miscellaneous functions that will promote the integrity and success of general, re-run and bye-elections.

**Table 1:** Electoral Commissions and their Chairmen in Nigeria from 1960 to date.

S/No	Republic	Electoral Commission	Chairman	Tenure
1	First Republic	Electoral Commission of Nigeria (ECN)	1. Sir Kafo Abayomi. 2. Chief E.E. Esua	1960 – 1964 1964 – 1966
2	Second Republic	Federal Electoral Commission (FADECO)	3. Chief Michael Ani 4. Justice Ovie Whiskey	1979 – 1983 1983 – 1987
3	Third Republic	National Electoral Commission (NEC)	5. Prof. Eme Ewa 6. Prof. Humprey Nwosu 7. Prof. Okon Uya 8. Chief Summer Dagogo Jack	1987 – 1989 1989 – 1993 1993 – 1994 1994 – 1998
4	Fourth Republic	Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)	9. Chief Ephraim Akpata 10. Dr. Abel Guobadia 11. Prof. Maurice Ewu 12. Prof. Attahiru Jega 13. Prof. Mahmood Yakubu	1999 – 2000 2000 – 2005 2005 – 2010 2010 – 2015 2015 - Date

Source: Electoral Commissions in Nigeria and their Chairmen since 1960 (Naijaabsolute.com), Wolejoja 2015, [www.inecnigeria.com](http://www.inecnigeria.com).

## DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN NIGERIA: THE WAY FORWARD

The concept of democracy, democratic consolidation and good governance over the years has become a contending matter of discourse. This according to Akus (2012) has threatened the political and socio-economic development of the nation. Though, national integration in Nigeria is meant to promote unity and development of the nation's and discourage religion or sectoral discrimination towards the consolidation of democratic principles and values, the nation's democratic profile has not done well in recent time owing to the problem of ethnicity and religion bigotry, monumental corruption, political interference and violence, weak initiation and implementation of government policies and programmes, regional agitations characterized with the militancy in the south-south region, sectoral opposition by the Odua People's Congress in the south-west, agitation for the sovereign state of Biafra by the south-east and activities of the dreaded Boko-Haram insurgency in the north east Nigeria. All these are indication of sectoral interest, party politics and regional affiliation of various interest groups and political stakeholders as against promotion of national unity, national integration and development to see the nation as a unified constituent towards an undivided quest for national development and promotion of an egalitarian society.

Abah, Akus (2009), Hyginus (2000) and Oguntola (2001) posit that national integration can be accomplished in Nigeria through sound inter-tribal and inter-religious marriages as it will promote and guarantee tribal and religious tolerance. More so, promotion of sound moral value through the national educational policy and socio-cultural values to the citizenries through justice, equality, moral norms and respect for one another are means of enhancing national integration. Finally, strengthening of the nation's democratic institution through adequate funding of the electoral management body, independent of judiciary and freedom of the press would guarantee national integration and promotion of good governance in Nigeria.

## CONCLUSION

The paper from the conceptual and empirical exploration concludes that the electoral management body has played a significant role to Nigeria democratic consolidation. Though, the effort of electoral umpire has not been without challenges, it has enhance democratic principles, value and the promotion of national integration.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The paper therefore makes the following recommendations:

- i. That democratic institution should be strengthened through funding of the electoral bodies.
- ii. That the judiciary should be adequately funded and properly staffed to handle electoral cases with the needed dispatch.
- iii. That the national orientation agency through the mass media should carry out constant enlightenment to the citizens on the important of free, fair and credible election.
- iv. The 2010 electoral Act should be adequately implemented so as to promote sound democratic culture in Nigeria.
- v. The need to de-emphasize politics and put more emphasis on governance after general elections should be advocated and vigorously followed so as to promote good governance, merit in political appointments rather than partisanship to have an all-inclusive government.
- vi. There should be accountability in governance so as to strengthen democratic culture for national development.

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