

Review

Africans and the ballot box: A review of election challenges, prospects and constraints in Nigeria - institutional and process framework

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Election management has remained an enigmatic challenge to emerging democracies especially in Africa. Therefore, managing elections at diverse periods and contexts have therefore necessitated the rise of many formidable questions on the stability and viability of these emerging democratic states. Indeed, what really makes a democracy rest on the quality of elections, which is essentially based on the evolution, growth and effectiveness of election managers and the political context within which they operate? Principal election experiences such as the 2011 elections in Nigeria, the Nigerien episode, the elections in the Republic of Congo and Benin Republic giving rise to the Jonathans, Yusufus and the Kabilas, etc are Africa's most recent electoral beacons; more so, in terms of providing the coordinates upon which the challenges and controversies they have generated have emerged. In this article, the author has specifically used the experience of election management institutions in Nigeria not only to reflect on our national experiences but also to stimulate more discussions on contemporary issues affecting election and electoral bodies within the framework of emerging democracies. The bulk of the materials or evidence used in this study was basically obtained from credible secondary sources. Additional information were also gathered from interactions and interviews with practicing politicians, scholars as well as senior managers of state-led electoral bodies that operated at different epochs of Nigeria's political history. The paper concluded that civil society groups have a role to play in building democracies in Africa; therefore should be energized into picking strategic roles in promoting greater citizens' participation and by implication making the election umpires more result oriented.

Key words: Election, rules, law, performance, candidates, parties, voters, registration, democracy.

INTRODUCTION

Electoral bodies are usually established by law to carry out functions or roles as clearly specified in the law establishing them. Various Electoral commissions were established in Nigeria to conduct and supervise national and other elections from 1958 to 1999. These electoral bodies were:

- (a) The Electoral Commission of Nigeria (ECN) 1958 established under the provisions of the Nigeria (Electoral provisions) Order-in- Council Legal Notice No. 77 1958) to conduct Federal Election of 1959.
- (b) The Federal Electoral Commission (FEC) established

to conduct 1964 Federal Elections.

(c) The Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) established in 1976 for the 1979 and 1983 general elections at both federal and state levels.

(d) The National Electoral Commission (NEC) set up in 1987 which also conducted series of elections culminating in the Presidential Election of June 12, 1993 which was annulled by the military regime of General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida.

(e) The National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON) established in 1993 which conducted National and State Assembly elections during the transition period



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(f) The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) 1998 which conducted elections in 1998/1999, 2003 and 2007, and the 2011 general elections. In addition, the INEC conducted other governorship elections, which were for different reasons shifted to other dates as a result of court decisions.

In tracing broadly the historical antecedents in the conduct of elections in Nigeria, it is vital to note the existence of the national electoral bodies mentioned above in addition to the various regional electoral commissions established by the Regional governments of the West, East and North. These were formed to conduct regional elections from 1951-1965. The State Electoral Commissions were also established by the State Governments to conduct and supervise Local Government elections in the states between 1979 and 2007. Various state governments have established state Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECS) in order to conduct local government elections in their respective states.

Historically, it also should be noted that the first Federal Elections held in 1954 was conducted on behalf of the Federation by the three Regional Governments under separate sets of electoral regulations. The 1959 and 1964 Federal elections were also conducted under the auspices of the Regional Governments under uniform electoral regulations. This meant that the Regions (States) established electoral commissions which handled elections at regional levels and also conducted Federal Elections on behalf of the Federal Electoral Commission. FEDECO was centrally created in 1976 to conduct all elections and it was structured in a manner that required it to decentralize its operations and depend on the State and Local Governments for the performance of its officials as diversely reported by Nwabueze (1993), Kurmi (2010), Ibezute (1999) and Nnoli (1980). Under this arrangement, Resident Electoral Commissioners were deployed from the Headquarters. The officers who ran the organization at the state/level were seconded from the State or Local Government services.

ELECTION COMMISSIONS: STRUCTURE, FUNCTION AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The structure, composition and roles of Electoral Commissions were set out in the law establishing them. For example, in the case FEDECO of 1976-1979 its functions or roles were as laid down in section 3 of Decree No. 41. These roles and functions were stated as follows:

(a) To recognize and supervise all matters pertaining to election into the National Assembly (Senate and House of Representatives), 19 state Assemblies, the offices of

19 states Governors and their Deputies and the offices the President of the Federal Republic, the election of the Vice President - five elections in all.

(b) To register all political parties and determine their eligibility to sponsor candidates for elections.

(c) To carry out such functions as may be conferred on it by law. These include:

(i) The division, by reference to the 1963 population census, of the Federation or, as the case may be, the area of a state, into such number of constituencies as may be prescribed by law for the purpose of elections to be conducted by the commission under the Decree.

(ii) The registration of voters, the preparation and maintenance of registers of voters for the purposes of elections.

The functions of FEDECO as outlined above continued to be conferred on subsequent Electoral Commissions established by Federal Government to date, except that NEC, NECON and INEC were made to shoulder the additional responsibility of conducting and supervising Local Government elections.

The above provisions of *Decree No. 41* of 1976 with some modifications have been entrenched in the 1979 and 1999 constitutions of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Thus the role, composition, etc. of INEC have been clearly specified in item of the first part of the third schedule of the *Nigerian Constitution* [1999].

METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

In writing this paper, a lot was obtained from secondary sources. This was principally facilitated by a series of interactions with a few officials of the INEC at the Headquarters as well some of the offices located in Jigawa and Kaduna states, both in North West Geopolitical Zone. Officials in the Public Relations Units of the Abuja office as well as the states enabled the writer a wider access to a number of secondary materials as well as some of the resident officers of the commission. The Aminu Kano Center for Democratic Studies, Mumbaiya House was also another veritable source of secondary information on African elections in general. The INEC offices as well as the Mumbaiya House were indeed formidable sources of primary data in the light of what the writer obtained from an unstructured Electoral processes.

ELECTORAL PROCESSES: "FROM THE ROOTS"

The Electoral processes begin with the delimitation of constituencies or electoral districts. It progresses through the intervening states and terminates with the final adjudication of election disputes or petitions at a conventional court or election tribunal. The actual

conduct and supervision of the poll itself is one of the most important stages of the election process and is essentially a synthesis of the preceding stages. The principal electoral law makes detailed provisions relating to the procedure and methodology for conduct and supervision of elections. These include:

- (a) Compilation of the electoral or voters register.
- (b) Establishment and equipping of polling stations and polling booths.
- (c) Recruitment, training and deployment of Electoral Officials.
- (d) Logistics, which involves, *inter alia*, the procurement and distribution of a host of electoral materials and equipment and their retrieval.
- (e) Screening of candidates wishing to contest election.
- (f) Registration of political parties.
- (g) Fixing of election dates.
- (h) Casting of the ballot.
- (i) Counting of votes and declaration of election results and their transmission to the constituency Headquarters.
- (j) Election petitions.

These are some of the electoral processes that INEC as an electoral body is supposed to carry out with utmost impartiality, transparency, integrity, justice, fairness and efficiency and to the satisfaction of the generality of the stakeholders, voters, candidates, political parties and their supporters, government of the day, the populace and international Election monitors or observers, when and if invited to witness the elections.

Election activities: The Nigerian experience

Elections as said in a Spanish congress meeting by a renown Spanish politician, Antonio Maura [1853-1925] represents a "swarm of high and low agents of the Government falls on villages and towns and unfolds the whole repertory of its overbearing acts, puts in practice all the arts of abuse, and realizes the most outrageous falsifications and manipulations and tries on the most ingenious tricks and deceits". A cursory examination of election activities in Nigeria would reveal clearly the place of electoral commission in the management of the electoral process. Where anyone of them is shabbily undertaken, the overall success of election would thus be affected. A party registration process for instance lacking in transparency and due process could provoke aggrieved political associations to undermine the system. Similarly, a voter registration that is not authentic and update or delimitation of consistency exercise that gives undue advantage to certain groups at the expense of others could only lead to a dysfunctional system and could eventually scuttle the electoral process. Assignments of so many responsibilities or concentration of powers in one electoral body may not be conducive to

free and fair elections. Divisions of labor or diffusion of responsibilities is therefore an effective safeguard against manipulation of the electoral system. For example, the responsibilities of managing British elections are split among Boundary commission, registration officers, electoral/returning officers and judicial bodies each of which is under the control of a separate authority. Any attempt at an improper action by an official somewhere in the system would thus be challenged by some other official independent of him.

Decree No. 73 [1977] did reflect and allow separation of power/functions between Electoral Officer who conduct elections and Returning Officers who supervise counting of votes and announcement of election results. However, Electoral Act 1982 and subsequent Electoral Decrees assigned these roles to one official; that is, the presiding officer who conducts elections and supervises counting of votes and announces the results of the same elections. He can therefore cover up any misdeeds committed by him.

In carrying out its functions, the methodology and procedure adopted by the commission must be guided by the need to enthrone credibility and adherence to the rule of law in the electoral process. The commission itself, as an umpire, is expected, by law, to observe the rules of the electoral games since the whole purpose of the game can be marred by poor officiating. The law establishing it must properly define its functions, powers and responsibilities to enable it officiate adequately in the electoral process. It must also have the autonomy to operate without hindrance and in the way that can erode its credibility and compromise its authority and ability to elicit confidence in the people. The provision in the constitutions relating to the autonomy of the commission gives administrative autonomy to INEC but certainly not financial autonomy which for many of us is more vital. A situation where the budget of the Commission is regulated by government could seriously affect planning and the execution of its activities. The commission, to cite one example, had planned to commence computerization of voters register in November 2001 but due to lack of funds from the government, the task could not take off until September 2002.

The challenge of election financing in Nigeria

Elections, and indeed a democracy, are arguably very expensive. There is no short cut if success must be achieved. Elections in most parts of the world involve huge and complex activities requiring enormous human and material resources. Thus, adequate finances should be provided for each aspect and at every stage of the electoral process. Essentially, funds are needed for timely procurement of quality electoral materials as well as for the payment of honoraria to *ad hoc* staff. It is worth mentioning here that Nigeria spends the least amount per

head on election in Africa. Abel Guobadia, one time Chairman of INEC declared, “a recent study by international election experts has rated Nigeria as the least spender on elections in Africa, Nigeria spends a meager \$0.7 cents per registered voter as compared to US \$10.2 in Mozambique and \$0.99 in Ghana. The international election experts recommended an average expenditure of \$1.50 per registered voter in developing countries. Guobadia added that the net impact of the low remuneration rate payable in Nigeria has been the inability to attract persons of the required integrity, hence the poor response from credible persons, to advertisement for recruitment of temporary election staff. Organizing an acceptable election in an atmosphere devoid of moral, physical, fiscal and logistic obstacles and strains remains not only the Electoral commission’s primary functions but its most pertinent challenge. Numerous factors determine the ability of the electoral commission to play a role designed to achieve these laudable objectives. These factors include the following:

Composition and structure of the Commission

Like in the case of most federal organizations, INEC also reflects the federal character of the country. In 1958, the commission comprised a Chairman and five members representing the constituent units of the ‘country, namely Northern, western eastern Regions; southern Cameroon and Lagos Federal Territory, while the FEDECO of 1976 comprised a Chairman, 19 members representing the 19 states of the Federation plus four female members. The pattern continued until 1987 when a sort of “*double-decker*” structure” was introduced comprising National Electoral Commissioners and Resident Electoral Commissioners operating in the states.

The INEC, as it is constituted today has inherited this structure. The composition of the commission is also done in a manner that reflects the basic sensibilities of the society. In constituting the commission in 1985, the Governor General had to pick men and women of “neutral views” that trend has continued to be of significant consideration in the composition of the commission and its management. The chairman of the commission and other members must be persons of maturity and proven integrity who have been tested in the society. The ages of the Chairman and each of the twelve National Electoral Commissioners of INEC have been fixed in the 1999 Constitution to be not less than 50 years and 40 years respectively (FRN Constitution, 1999; Electoral Act, 2010).

To ensure genuine independence and the nerve to take critical decisions, the tenure of appointment of the Chairman, the National Electoral Commissioners and the core management staff of the commission is secured and guaranteed by adequate legislation. It is only the President that has power to remove any member (subject

to confirmation of the Senate) from office and such removal must be as a result of inability of the member to discharge the functions of his/her office or for any act of misconduct. Just like the Chairman of the Commission, the Secretary is equally appointed by the President. Such appointment is equally guided by qualifications and experience (FRN Constitution, 1999; Electoral Act, 2006; Electoral Act (Amended), 2010).

Staffing

While commissioners organize and supervise all matters pertaining to elections, it is permanent and *ad hoc* or temporary staff of the commission that at the end manage the election process. Thus, it is incumbent on the commission to employ persons of incontestable integrity to perform these functions and to ensure successful management of the electoral process. For the 1979 Elections, FEDECO issued guidelines on the qualities and qualification of electoral personnel. Officers appointed to conduct registration of voters and election at all levels must, as far as humanly possible, be selected from amongst people who enjoy a reputation of honesty, integrity and impartiality. Individuals who are known to take active part in politics were excluded. Decree No. 41 of 1977 gave FEDECO absolute freedom to employ its principal and other staff except the Executive Secretary who is appointed by government. Item 'F' of the first part of the Third Schedule of the 1999 Constitution confers similar powers on present INEC. Between 2007 and 2010, this issue generated a lot of controversies within the polity. The parliament was particularly on war path with the presidency on this subject which actually commenced with the ‘leaked’ report of the Justice Uwais Commission. At the end, the old practice, in which the Election Chief was to be appointed by the President, remained.

Funding and equipment

Conduct and supervision of elections in a vast, populated country like Nigeria with varying, sometimes difficult terrain, is a very expensive affair. The reports on the logistics of the elections in 1959, 1979, 1983 and subsequent elections give the quantum and cost of equipment, forms, notices and other materials such as ballot boxes and ballot papers required for registration of voters and the elections. Commissions must therefore be adequately funded by government to enable them carry out the responsibilities assigned to them.

Logistic planning for an efficient electoral process is quite often marred by not only the inadequate level of funding but also by the untimely release of budgeted funds. An election time-table is also subject to deadlines; hence, once an election date has been fixed, the

timetable for the performance of vital tasks cannot be altered. An election requires the mobilization and timely deployment of hundreds of thousands of reliable, honest, knowledgeable and well-educated people to many different locations based on the election time-table. It also requires the simultaneous movement of myriad of forms, supplies and equipment to the various locations. It is understood that for the 2003 general elections, INEC planned for 20,000 polling-registration centers which may require a total of over 400,000 officials to man effectively.

The integrity of an election can be compromised by the quality of the *ad hoc* electoral personnel and the temporary staff employed to carry out the registration of voters or for polling day duties. Reliable, honest, knowledgeable and well-educated persons command high remuneration.

Not only adequate funding but its timely release is an essential condition for greater accuracy in such tasks as the compilation of the voters register, the delimitation of constituencies and the deployment of men and materials to polling-registration centres. Late release of funds which lead to hurried preparation in order to meet deadlines can result in unavoidable delays, inadequacies and irregularities in deployment. Some people usually take advantage of such delays and irregularities to manipulate the electoral process to their advantage.

Clean and correct registers of voters

This is an essential foundation of good election. Hitherto, before general elections were held, the voters registers were compiled hurriedly and manually at approved registration centres over the prescribed period of between two or six weeks. The manually compiled register has the problems of bogus and fictitious entries; on Election Day, this posed the problems of impersonation and of ballot stuffing. The commission after the 1999 general elections took the decision to computerize the voter's Register with a view to preventing impersonation and making the registration of voters a continuous exercise so as to be able to capture all qualified voters and have ample time for making corrections. This was achieved during the recent registration of voters exercise. The 2015 General Elections tremendously benefited from this innovation as the introduction of digital card readers did not only simplify the process but made it most credible.

Funding and budgetary constraints

Arbitrary cut by officials of the Ministry of Finance or the Presidency, in the budget proposals submitted by the commission landed it in serious logistical problems. Such happened to FEDECO in 1979 when the number of polling stations was arbitrarily reduced from 116,000 to 97,000. This arbitrary decision imposed on FEDECO as reported by Kurmi (2010) caused a lot of hardship to

voters, especially in large and/or sparsely populated states. Some voters had to trek for up to 50 km to cast their votes.

There is the erroneous tendency to blame all malpractices and irregularities in the electoral process at the doorstep of the commission. The activities of many other bodies and organizations impinge on the smooth running of the electoral system. It is useful to identify these bodies and their roles.

Government of the Nigerian Federation

Governments at state and federal levels should structure and constitute the electoral commission (INEC and SIECS) to guarantee their independence from executive control. They should also ensure the independence of the electoral commissions (INEC and SIECS) through adequate funding and timely release of funds as and when requested. In addition, Laws which guarantee a level playing field for all participants for elective offices should be enacted and enforced. Use of governmental resources (men, materials and funds) to promote interest of the party in government abuse of power of incumbency should be avoided. So also should discriminatory laws such as censorship of materials, limitation to information, or targeting of particular individuals be effected. Government's involvement in these makes or mars the electoral process as Douglas (2010) and Kurmi (2010) harmoniously asserted.

The political parties

In developed democracies, the party culture is the fulcrum of the electoral process. The parties function as institutions for the expression of ideas and the management of conflicts. According to the then INEC Chairman, Dr Guobadia:

"Nigerian political parties behave like war machines cooked almost permanently to go into combat with perceived opponents, both existing and potential. More often than not, the enemy is not just the opposition party but also the electorates who refuse to toe the party line. Once in power, the parties want to remain there forever (TAZARCE) by hook or by crook, intolerant to challenges either from within or from without. Another disturbing dimension is the lack of cohesion within each of the parties which generates intra-party wrangling and endless crisis. Such crisis which degenerates into intra-party factions spillover into elections, with each faction presenting different candidates (Goubadia, 2009)".

Although generally cooperative with the electoral commission during the period up to the commencement of the poll, the actions or reactions of some political party leaders, candidates sponsored by them and their supporters after declaration of election results leaves much to be desired. Accusations against the commission by political parties and candidates are centered on free

and fair election, manipulation of the ballot or “rigging” as it is popularly known in Nigeria.

An election may be compared to a game, which like all games, has to be played in accordance with accepted rules. It includes a number of operations, beginning with the preparation of electoral rolls and ending in the counting of votes and the declaration of election results. There are rules in respect of each of these operations. It is only when they are strictly observed that elections deserve to be spoken of as free and fair. If they are broken, the election becomes un-free and unfair.

The rules accepted may be broken by voters, candidates, political parties, the officials in control of the election operation, the police or the government of the day. All these may therefore, contribute to the unfairness of the elections. The breach of rules by the government of the day, political parties or by other may be the result of bribery and other corrupt and illegal practices as well as resort to intimidation and frauds. Thus, elections may be made unfair not only by administrators who are dishonest and corrupt but also the police if it ignores that its primary duty is to preserve law, order and peace. The fairness of elections is bound up with the honesty of the whole system of administration.

The media and civil society

The use to which the media is deployed is at the heart of creating a level playing field for all participants in the electoral process. The media has been associated with accusations ranging from selective reporting to reporting out of context, exaggeration and even outright falsehood. Sometimes, government owned media has been known to black out information relating to opposition parties, thus depriving them of access to the electorate. In other instance, some of the information media publish unauthenticated or outright false election results; thus, misleading the electorate, and creating unnecessary tension. The media must be moderately balanced in coverage of electoral activities and the issues that may surround them. It must decline or reject any advertisements that are obviously distasteful and not to allow any individuals or candidates to use it to pursue personal issues with other candidates; it must know, understand faithfully disseminate information about the electoral law and related constitutional provision with a view to educating the public correctly about the electoral process.

The Judiciary

In the 1996-1997 military transition programmes, some members of Election Tribunals were indicted for compromising themselves in their adjudication. It was a common allegation that some politicians who could not with the open elections purchased their victory through

the back door at election tribunals. Another area of grave concern is the frequent grant of injunctions to plaintiffs on electoral matters, especially when elections dates are close. Such injunctions destabilize the entire electoral process, with no real advantage to even the petitioner other than that of causing confusion so as to hurt the better chances of his opponent.

The judiciary must resort to speedy resolution of election related cases; and speedy resolution of disputes in interpreting the constitutional provisions relating to the electoral process.

Security agencies

Over the years, Electoral Commission and indeed the nation have mainly relied on the Nigeria Police to provide security. They are usually assisted by some para-military and volunteer groups. Unfortunately the police have not discharged this responsibility effectively due to a number of factors. Apart from inadequate manpower to man the 120,000 polling stations all over the country, the police lacks the logistics wherewithal to provide transport for the movement of their men deployed for operation on election day. Also disturbing is the attitudinal disposition of some officers deployed for election duties. Cases abounded where electoral offences were committed in the full glare of police who did not take any action to arrest the culprits but rather choose to look the other way. Even in the cases where arrests, were made, there was lack of diligent prosecution of offenders in the law courts. Such offenders were either released without trial or halfheartedly prosecuted without securing conviction. This attitude of the police has done a lot of damage to the electoral process. Not only is the process exposed to further abuses, it erodes the confidence of the people in the system.

Security agencies should know and understand all relevant electoral laws, rules and regulations; must be impartial in the enforcement of laws, rules and regulations; must be vigilant and diligent and be subordinate to the rule of law. The efforts of the Jonathan's federal administration to engage the use of soldiers during the 2015 General Election was openly criticized by politicians and the general citizenry. The issue was finally challenged in Court and as a consequence, Justice Ibrahim Buba of the Federal High Court, sitting in Lagos, laid to rest the raging controversy over deployment of soldiers for election as he ruled that such action contradicts ‘civil rule and constitutional democracy.’ The court, however said the President could deploy soldiers only with the approval of the National Assembly. Ruling on a suit filed by Hon. Femi Gbajabamila, the Minority Leader of the House of Representatives, which sought a declaration that deployment of soldiers during elections is illegal and unconstitutional. Justice Buba stated that deploying

military personnel in the conduct of elections, “when there is no uprising is anti-democratic and not in tandem with civil rule and constitutional democracy” as reported by Akeeb (2015).

Public enlightenment

Although not mandated statutorily to undertake this task, it has become necessary for Electoral Commission, since 1958 to launch publicity campaign about registration of voters and the election itself. This was particularly so in 1958 when directed elections were being introduced nation wide for the first time to an electorate that was largely illiterate and unsophisticated and in 1979 when the system of election and voting procedures were radically changed. The organization of the election at grassroots level, establishment of pooling stations and the mechanics of the election itself, has to be explained to the voters in the language they understood. Extensive and intensive publicity campaigns has to be undertaken by the electoral commission, using both modern electronic media, audio and video, the press and more importantly, the traditional methods of disseminating information at village level.

Registration of political parties

One of the major functions and responsibilities of the Electoral Commission is to register political parties that will participate in the electoral process. It is expected to determine the eligibility of such political parties to sponsor candidates for all the elections in the political system. The main purpose of the conditions prescribed for the registration of political parties is the promotion of national unity and political stability in the country. Accordingly, the ability of the Commission to accurately interpret and regulate this process is crucial and fundamental to national stability. In carrying out this function, the commission must be careful to ensure that its actions do not conflict with the individual's rights and liberty to freely associate and participate in partisan politics. The action must be in agreement with the constitutional tenet of freedom of association. The formation and registration of political parties must be guided by the need to allow them evolve naturally, based on members shared ideals, vision, values and basic compatibility and not legislative fiat. In other words, the commission will risk the loss of credibility if it sees its assignment as discouraging parties from participation in the electoral process on any basis other than promotion of national unity. The commission's regulation in respect of the registration of political parties must be allowed for the reduction in the range of alternatives available to members of society (Egwu, 2006; Ginsberg and Alan, 1996; Goubadia, 2009; Kurmi, 2010).

SUCCESS IN THE MANAGEMENT OF ELECTIONS

The success or otherwise of the Electoral Commission in the management of the electoral process can be gauged from what happens on polling day. For on this day, literally hundreds of small but separate tasks must be performed correctly and in sequence. Each of these tasks, regardless of its size, if neglected or improperly performed as scheduled, may lead to a serious election disorder. In the conduct of an election, there is no tomorrow. Elections must be conducted in a precise and timely manner and produce results as close to 100% as its is humanly possible to make them. 99% accuracy is insufficient and 90% performance is considered a total failure.

Polling Day is the Day of Judgment for all personnel participating in the election arrangements beginning from the delimitation of constituencies, the registration of voters, to the casting of the ballot itself and declaration of results. It is on the Election Day that the efficiency and efficacy of the election organization is tested and also the capacity of Electoral Commission in the management of the electoral process is brought into fore. Has the election been free and fair and without serious hitches that might have dented the credibility of the electoral process? Have the results of the election been generally acceptable to the candidates, the voters, the generality of the populace and the international community? If all these are positively answered, then the objective of successful management of the electoral process has been achieved. If not, the reverse is the case. However, acceptability or otherwise of election results has to be viewed in the context of the Nigerian political system. The acceptance of defeat by President Jonathan at the 2015 polls before INEC's formal announcement is indeed indicative of the growing improvement in Nigeria's electoral politics. Several other politicians also emulated President Jonathan's humility in expressing their acceptance of defeat at the polls.

“Free and fair” elections mean different things to different people. To the Nigerian politicians, an election is free and fair when one's party or candidate wins it. It is rigged or “un-free and unfair” if the election is lost. This was particularly true of the 1979 General elections when allegation of “rigging” or manipulating the elections were made by all the political parties. Each claimed that the elections were rigged in the area where it woefully failed to win seats. For example, the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) and the Nigerian People's Party (NPP) were unanimous in their allegations that the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) rigged the election in Lagos, Oyo, Ondo, and Ogun states where UPN as the result indicated 'swept' the polls; the NPN and UPN accused the NPP of rigging the elections in Anambra and Imo states which were largely considered as 'NPP's strongholds'. The UPN, NPP and the Great Nigeria People's Party (GNPP) accused the NPN of rigging the election in Benue,

Sokoto, Niger, Kwara and other states where the NPN 'won'; the People's Redemption (PRP) and GNPP were in turn accused of rigging the election in Kano and Borno states respectively where these parties emerged victorious over other parties. Thus, in Nigeria, an election is "free-and fair" or massively rigged depending on the fortunes at the election of the candidates or party making the allegations. The basic shortcoming in the average Nigerian politician is therefore his apparent reluctance to accept defeat in a political contest and his propensity to ascribe or attribute defeat or failure at any endeavour to some extraneous, irrelevant and imaginary forces that were bent on his or her "destruction" such as political opponents, government or any of its agencies/officials, particularly Electoral Commissions, whom Kurmi (2010) declared as "the proverbial whipping boy of political parties".

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Having examined the roles of Electoral Commissions in the management of the electoral process, especially the 1979 General Elections, it is expedient to re-state that the roles played by various Nigerian Electoral Commissions since 1958 were determined by the various constitutional provisions, Acts, Decrees, establishing them. These 'tools', it is largely assumed gave them the latitude to operate freely as independent bodies without any hindrance or undue interference from the government of the day. A more proactive body of rules which must address some of the legal hindrances to the attainment of credible elections should therefore be initiated.

The governments, which established, staffed and funded the commissions, must also provide them with the wherewithal for their operation. Issues of equipment supplies to be attended to in good time must also be properly provided for. Supplies of more advanced equipment that can be monitored and operated by all stakeholders should be pursued. By not having its planned activities as and when due, it is our general view that the overall success of election could be grossly impaired. It is therefore pertinent that the Commission's financial resources be directly obtained from the consolidated Revenue Fund; it should be completely self-accounting and maintain full and complete accounting records and submit it for auditing at the end of each financial year. In terms of staffing, more effective and better trained staff – permanent and *ad-hoc* should be more closely looked at. The deployment of Youth Corp members should be more closely addressed with a view to re-examining the strength and lapses of their involvement. This is with a bid to checkmating some of the lapses that were noted in the recent past when Youth Corp members were deployed.

The political parties that are supposed to be partners in progress with the commissions must cooperate with the latter and not make things difficult for them. The structures, composition of the Commissions as well as the caliber of their memberships, their staffing and funding must be adequate and guaranteed by legislation. States and Local government co-operation and assistance must be accorded on the Commissions to enhance their performance. All stakeholders in the electoral process must join hands to achieve the objectives of successful management of the electoral process with a view to producing election results that will be acceptable to the electorate, candidate, political parties general populace and the internationally community.

The Commission must be seen to be an impartial umpire officiating the political game in accordance with the laid down rules and regulations, with transparency, integrity, equity, justice and fair play. To achieve this goal, election managers MUST not only broaden but enhance citizens' participation especially through the organized civil society and their networks.

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