

Election, Governance and the Challenge of National Integration in the Nigerian Fourth Republic

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Abstract

This paper through the use of the system analytical framework discusses the hyphen and buckle between elections and governance as well as the implication they tend to have on national integration with specific focus on the Nigerian scenario. The study thus accentuates using the concept of equality, political leadership and institutional performance as unit of analysis that poor electoral processes in the Nigerian republics led to poor governance and vice – versa, with negative implication on democratic stability and the unity of the Nigerian State. It further stated that although in the fourth republic, the democratic process started with the attempt to check democratic instability and threat to statehood through an adopted zoning arrangement especially by the dominant Peoples Democratic Party, however, the distortion of this arrangement in the 2011 general elections, coupled with poor electoral processes and governance has further challenge national integration in Nigeria through the heightened activities of ethnic militia as a result of lost of confidence in the governmental system. The paper therefore recommends among others the need for the electoral process to be free, fair, credible and participatory and for governance to be people centred.

Keywords: *Democratization, Electoral Process, Equality, Institutional Performance, Political Leadership, Poor Governance.*

1.1 Introduction

The history of elections in the Nigerian state has been characterized by threats to statehood based on the manipulation of ethnicity as divisive mechanism for the acquisition of political power by political actors, the fragile nature of political cum democratic institutions, poor democratic culture by the Nigerian citizenry among others. (Omodia 2010a; Omodia 2011; Omodia and Egwemi, 2011). The result therefore is the emergence of political leaders from a manipulated pseudo – democratic arrangements that is antithetical to democratic development. This is coupled with the manifestation of poor governance as well as a policy process that is centred on the benefit of those in government and their cronies.

In other words, one could convincingly say that there is an hyphen and buckle between the quality of election that takes place in a state and the quality of governance that emanate from such an electoral process on one hand, as well as poor governance and threat to national integration on the other hand, especially in a multi – ethnic state like Nigeria. In the Nigerian state, the poor electoral process of the first and second republics no doubt led to the termination of the republic through coup de'tat (Adegboyega 1981; Kurfi 1983). While in both republic, one could argue that poor electoral process in itself constitute a remote cause of the termination of the republics, the immediate causes of corruption, economic mismanagement among others (Azelama, 2010) were tied to poor governance by the civilian political leadership and the sabotage of the democratic experiment by opposition leaders based on the inability of the government in power to reconcile cracks in statehood as a result of electoral contest.

The above background therefore, throw more light on our thesis of poor electoral process leading to poor governance, as well as poor governance serving as a threat to national integration. This no doubt constitute the utility of this paper with specific focus on the electoral process of the Nigerian fourth republic.

2.0 Framework of Analysis

The utility of the political system as analytical tool does not only accentuate the indispensability of the environment in influencing electoral inputs and governance, it also emphasizes how the environment help in shaping the quality of elections through the typology of political culture that could be said to be in existence in the state. This is coupled with the fact that it does shape governance to the extent that it could be classified as poor or good governance depending on the extent to which governmental outputs are people centred.

Although, David Easton stresses the integration of identified components that make up the political system based on the specificness of component functions (Easton, 1953). This is because the political system is chain structured with each component affecting the other. When this is related to the Nigerian scenario with focus on the electoral and governmental system, one could convincingly view the electoral system as a sub-system of the political or governmental system. This is not only because in a democratic set – up, governments and political regimes are expected to emanate from the outcome of electoral processes but also because government acting on behalf of the state is expected to provide a conducive atmosphere for the conduct of elections through legislation, funding and provision of security.

Thus, just as elections impact on governance, governance also tend to impact on electoral conduct. The association between elections and governance as a matter of fact could be a function of the relationship between inputs and outputs of the political system. For instance, in a situation where electoral output (results) is a function of input (votes), there is every tendency for governmental policies to be shaped by the demand and support injected into the system by the people.

Talking about support, this should be manifested not only by the electorates, but, indeed the political actors who are seeking political offices. This indeed could be possible when both the electoral process and governance expresses confidence in the system where political contestants feel that offices have been fairly contested and won, and that governance irrespective of the outcome of the electoral process is integrative.

3.0 Discussion and Analysis

3.1 Elections and Governance Before the 4th Republic

On this section the argument of the researcher is anchored on the conception that just as elections tend to influence governance in Nigeria, the quality of governance to a great extent also tend to affect the Nigerian electoral process. As regard the political activities before the fourth republic the pattern of governance to a great extent determined the electoral process. For instance, under colonial domination, especially in the earlier part, the electoral process was restrictive both on the basis of residence and property (Crowder 1968; Fayam 2008). This was because democratic governance was viewed as a transformational experiment and also based on the fact that the colonialist at this stage never wanted to relinquish political power to the indigenous political elites, coupled with the notion that the indigenous political elites at this stage were only agitating for the right to be involved in the governmental process rather than the granting of political independence (Adigwe, 1977).

When the colonialist eventually decided to relinquish political power in 1960, the 1959 general elections leading to the acquisition of independence status became a more open electoral system and as a matter of fact a major improvement on the previous elections. After colonial domination, governmental pattern of the Nigerian first republic was greatly influenced by ethnic party politics, as a result, the electoral process became characterized by ethnicism and electoral manipulations that were antithetical to democratic norms. Although ethnic party politics was visible under colonial domination, its negative manifestations were checked by colonial governance and the willingness of the politicians to check such differences in favour of the uniform interest of political independence. Thus, after the attainment of political independence, ethnicization of governance through the party machinery led to the termination of the republic, majorly as a result of the electoral crisis of the 1964/65 elections (Ademoyega 1981).

Conversely, while the scenario stated above is synonymous with governance influencing elections in Nigeria, this aspect focuses on the influence of elections on governance in the Nigerian State. For instance, the Nigerian second republic was midwived by the military. The conception of Olagunju *et al.* (1993) on the process leading to political governance was viewed by them as a mechanism and a device intended to return governance to the military in a very short time because of constitutional contradiction and electoral crisis that was passed on to the civilian administration by the military. These devices were expected to weaken political legitimacy and institutions such as political parties and the electoral body to mention a few. However, four years after, electoral crisis became deepened and the republic could not stand.

The aborted third republic on the other hand, witnessed a transition programme that that was designed to fail based on the military governing elites unwillingness to give up political power. As a result, the transition timetable to democratic government was characterized by revisions, politicians were banned and unbanned, elections were conducted into local government offices on party and non party basis (Ola, 2010). Eventually when presidential election was conducted in June 12, 1993, and the process regarded as free and fair, the election was annulled by the military junta (Omodia 2007; Omodia 2010b; Ola 2010). Thus governance under this dispensation became synonymous with crisis, threat to statehood as a result of the suspicion by the Southerners that the Northerners never wanted a southern to govern. And eventually when an Interim National Government was instituted and headed by a

southerner, Chief Ernest Shonekan, the support base of the government was low and this led to the seizure of power by General Sani Abacha, a very strong member of the Interim Government and the government of Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida who annulled the June 12 presidential election.

3.2 The Fourth Republic

In order to vividly capture elections and governance in the Nigerian fourth republic, the concepts: equality, political leadership and institutional performance would be used as unit of analysis. While the concept equality focuses on the extent in which the citizens manifest access in the political decision making process, political leadership focuses on the responsiveness of the political leaders to the yearnings and expectations of the Nigerian people. Institutional performance on the other hand, refers to the performance of the democratic structures in ensuring good governance.

The Fourth Republic started with a very short transition programme by the military administration of Abubakar Abdulsalam from 1998 to 1999. In May 1999, the resultant political activity of the transition programme witnessed the smooth take – off of democratic governance in Nigeria. As regard equality, especially at the highest political office – the presidential election, political contest was restricted to the western part of the country. This was viewed as an intentional device by the political actors to compensate that part of the country for the annulment of the June 12 1993 presidential election which was believed to have been won by a South Westerner (Omodia 2010b). Although the electoral process conform with the principle of adult suffrage, there is not doubt that political participation was curtailed both in contest and in voting as a result of the scepticism expressed by the people as regard the commitment and capacity of the military to midwife a smooth democratization process considering the experience of the 1990's were the process was aborted or manipulated by the military in order to pave way for self military to civilian transition.

The resultant scenario brings us to the factor of political leadership. In other words, political scepticism or apathy that was manifested during the 1999 electoral process brought about a situation where quality governance or quality political leadership was compromised. For instance, during this dispensation, the Speaker of the Nigerian House of Representatives was impeached for falsification of entry educational qualification. This is coupled with the high level of instability that was witnessed in the Nigerian Senate of the National Assembly as a result of lack of quality leadership. This scenario no doubt persisted even up to the end of the Olusegun Obasanjo administration in 2007. Based on the above therefore, one could say that institutional performance especially by the organs of government was minimal and negligible as a result of the quality of the political actors that manned those institutions.

During the 2003 and 2007 general elections, access to the political process was widened as a result of the increase in the number of political parties based on the interest of Nigerians in seeking political offices (Omodia and Egwemi 2011). As a matter of fact, the restrictions that were witnessed in the 1999 presidential election were not part of the 2003 and 2007 presidential elections as various people from different parts of the country contested for the office of the president within the dominant parties and during inter party contest.

However, it is important to state that the poor level of political leadership cum institutional performance led to the manipulation of the electoral process in favour of the party in power at the centre and in most states of the federation during the gubernatorial elections in 2003 which was heightened during the 2007 general elections (Akinbobola 2003; Aper 2008; Egwemi 2008). The 2007 general election was viewed as the worst election in the history of Nigeria, with the declared winner of the presidential election, Alhaji Umaru Yar'Adua acknowledging the flawness of the process that brought him into power (Egwemi 2008). The effect was that enormous time and resources was injected into

forming a Government of National Unity in order to legitimize the Yar'Adua's government which resulted into a snail speed developmental effort in term of governance.

With the demise of Umaru Yar'Adua in May 5th 2010 and with the North bent on retaining political power till 2015 to serve their eight year term based on the in-house understanding of zoning of political offices by the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP), coupled with the shown interest of the incumbent, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan who emerged as president after the demise of Yar'Adua, in contesting for the office of the President under the umbrella of the PDP, the 2011 presidential election was set for a true test of equality as regard the contest for political office.

Although the incumbent, Goodluck Jonathan emerged as the party candidate of the PDP in a tensed intra party democratic process and eventually won the inter party contest in April 2011, the effect has been lack of focused governance as a result of terrorist acts by the northern ethno – religious militia known as 'Boko Haram'.

4.0 Implication for National Integration

The implication of elections and governance on the Nigerian State could be said to be far reaching. Negatively, the road to democratic governance was characterized by coups and counter coups by the military, mutual suspicion on the part of the ethnic nationalities that make up the Nigerian State with activities leading to increase of the unity of Nigeria, political apathy as a result of lost of confidence in the electoral cum democratic process to mention a few.

For instance, as regard coups and counter coups, the electoral crisis of the first republic 1964/1965 no doubt constitute one of the factors that led to the termination of the republic and brought about military dictatorship. The counter coup by the Yakubu Gowon led military administration in 1966 snowball into the Nigeiran civil war (Nwosu et al 1998), the poor electoral process of 1983 and the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election paved way for military take – over in the Nigerian democratic experiment of those dispensation (Falola and Ihon Vbere 1985; Akinboye 2004).

On mutual suspicion amongst the ethnic nationalities that constitute the Nigerian state, the pattern of politicking and the nature of ethnicization of political parties could be associated with the de-democratization of republics in Nigeria. In the first republic, the ethnic and fragile nature of political institutions brought the republic to an end through military intervention in governance. Although the intervention which brought an Ibo officer into office as Head of Government was bloody with mostly politicians from the North as casualties. This scenario created a wide gap and distrust between the Hausas of the North and the Ibos of the South – East, a situation which fueled the counter coup of 1966 and eventually culminated into the Nigeria civil war.

In addition, the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election had negative implication on national integration in Nigeria as the Yoruba's from the South felt that the annulment was a calculated attempt by the Northerners not to accommodate non northerners to be in charge of political power in a democratic dispensation. The effect no doubt was poor support base from other ethnic nationalities for the military regime of General Sani Abacha that later seized power (Dauda, 2006).

In the Nigerian fourth republic, attempt at correcting the suspicion of the past and enhancing national integration through the democratic process led to the restriction of presidential ambition to the South – West by the three major political parties during the 1999 presidential election. This is coupled with the gentleman zoning arrangement of the dominant political party. People's Democratic Party (PDP), which led to the emergence of a Northerner as the president of Nigeria in 2007 after a South West President from 1999 – 2007. However, as earlier stated, this arrangement for national integration has been marred with the demise of Umaru Yar'Adua as president in 2010 and the election of a Southerner as president in 2011 before the expiration of the eight year term of the North.

On political apathy, the poor nature of electoral process in the past both at intra and inter parity level of political contest through imposition of party candidates, ballot box snatching, stuffing, manipulation of electoral results at collation centres to mention a few (Omodia 2012), has led to lost of confidence in the electoral process by most electorates. The implication therefore is that there is often wide gap between the number of people that register to vote and the actual number of people that comes out to cast their votes. A typical example is the Kogi State 2011 gubernatorial election where out of the 1,325,272 registered voters only 518,949 electorate voted (Nigerian Tribune, 2011).

4.0 Towards National Integration in Nigeria

The analysis above has shown that elections and governance are central to national integration in Nigeria. This is because it focused on and covers the distribution of both political powers and resources. The argument of this paper is that if national integration is to be strengthened in a multi – ethnic state such as Nigeria, then, the electoral process must be free, fair, credible and highly participatory.

The researcher's idea of participatory election is one which is not only restricted by symbolic voting, but such votes must be designed to count. In addition, the electoral process should also be designed in such a way that the political actors manifest support for the electoral process through a system that enables every qualified citizens irrespective of ethno – religious affiliation to contest for political office and believe that he/she would not be disadvantaged on primary issues but on the perception of his/her capacity to deliver.

Thus, political governance emanating from a qualitative electoral process is also expected to be qualitative by being people centred and non restrictive to ethno religious consideration. In other words, the entire Nigerian state is expected to be the constituency of the Nigerian democratic leader and his policies should be propelled by national interest rather than parochial, selfish, class or ethnic that could fuel suspicion among the ethnic nationalities that make up the Nigerian state or could indeed fuel crisis.

5.0 Conclusion

The thesis of this paper was anchored on the understanding that the quality of elections to a great extent tend to shape governance and vice versa, with the scenario impacting on national integration. While this could be said to have been demonstrated in the body of the paper with the political activities of the first, second and aborted third republic. In the fourth republic although the electoral processes were fairly better than what was obtainable in the first and second republic with the exception of the 2007 general elections, however, in the fourth republic, governance could generally be described to be poor based on poor institutional performance, political leadership as well as the manipulation of political participation in such a way that equality is marred. The attendant effect has been the manifestation of frustration by the citizenry and threat to statehood by ethnic militia that have emanated as a result of frustration with governance and political leadership.

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