

Review Article

DEMOCRACY, ELECTION AND DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract: The study explored the dynamics of democracy, elections, and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. It delved into the historical context of Nigeria's journey to democracy, while exploring the key concepts of the study. The study further posits that democratic consolidation can only be attained through the acceptance of the democratic process instituted within the given society, and in this instance, Nigeria. The study adopted group theory to examine the behavior and actions of the Nigerian electorate before and during elections in the country. The causes and effects of election violence in an attempt to achieve democratic consolidation in Nigeria were also examined. The study concluded by recommending that the electoral umpire in Nigeria should be seen as being truly independent, with the needed capacity to conduct credible, free and fair elections in the country that will clearly reflect the will and aspirations of the Nigerian electorate.

Keywords: Democracy, Election, Democratic, Consolidation, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Democracy in Nigeria can be traced to the pre-independence period with the introduction of the elective principle in 1992. Though democracy cannot be fully said to have been instilled in the governance of the country during this time, as the country was still under colonial rule with an administrative head (Governor-General) having a reserved veto over the policies and decisions taken in the country (Uwoh, 2019). Nigeria truly started practicing true democracy after gaining its political independence from Great Britain, and Nigerians were given the opportunity of electing fellow Nigerians into elective political offices without having any foreigners as representatives of their former colonial masters.

The nascent Democratic rule of Nigeria was prematurely truncated in 1966 with the military incursion through a coup de 'tat that brought the military to power. Successive military regimes held power until 1979, when Alhaji Shehu Shagari was elected as the first executive president of Nigeria, with the introduction of the presidential system of government in the country. The civilian administration did not last long before the military struck once more to take over the reins of power. And this lasted until 1999 when the present democratic session eventually came back to light.

Nigeria, under the present Fourth Republic, has encountered many challenges that are capable of truncating the ongoing democratic practice in the country. The country has been challenged by poor conduct of its periodic elections, which has placed a serious question mark on the consolidation of the tenets of democracy. Issues of election violence, election manipulation, thuggery, ballot box snatching, ballot box stuffing, intimidation and harassment of voters have become a recurrent occurrence in almost all elections conducted so far in the country. And democracy cannot in truth be consolidated under such an atmosphere and unfortunate practices.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Nigeria's journey to democratic rule have been filled with poppy-traps and many uncertainties. Elections as a vehicle of democratic peaceful transition of power from one administration to another have suddenly become a game of war in Nigeria, where the policy of do-or-die is being applied, and many political actors in the system deploy desperate means and measures to win elections at every cost humanly possible. The desperate measures and approaches being adopted by some of these political actors in the system have called to question the quest of democratic consolidation in the country.

The issue of election rigging, manipulation of the outcome of the electoral process, the use of thugs and security personnel to intimidate voters; the issue of vote buying have become the major challenges being faced by the Nigerian democratic process. Also, the allegation of manipulation of Judges handling election matters with the aim of subverting justice and denying the people their wishes in the poll have become one of the most troubling issue presently facing the country. And these issues and challenges have been threatening the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions will be guiding this study;

1. Has election manipulation become an acceptable norm in the quest of achieving democratic consolidation in Nigeria?
2. Is it possible for Nigeria to achieve democratic consolidation in the face of electoral manipulation?
3. What measures are being put in place to checkmate the incessant cases of election manipulation in the country?

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the study is to examine democracy, election and democratic consolidation in Nigeria; while the other objectives are;

1. To ascertain if election manipulation has become an acceptable norm in the quest of achieving democratic consolidation in Nigeria
2. To examine if it is possible for Nigeria to achieve democratic consolidation in the face of electoral manipulation
3. To ascertain measures being put in place to checkmate the incessant cases of election manipulation in the country

CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

Concept of Election

Election is a process through which political offices of government are filled; where the electorates are given the opportunity to elect their leaders through a democratic process that should be free, fair and transparent (Heywood, 2019). Election does not begin and end with the casting of votes by the electorate to elect their political leaders into government; it is also the act of citizens actively taking part in governance through ensuring the sustenance and consolidation of democracy in the country (David, 2020). Therefore, it can be said that election is a ritual organized periodically for the electorate to cast their votes for leaders of their choice, and it is also a veritable process through which leadership of the country are changed through a peace process aimed at achieving improved socio-economic policies that will become beneficial to the citizenry.

According to Ajayi (2020), election is a process through which suitable and qualified candidates standing for elective positions are chosen for political offices through casting of votes. It is an opportunity available to the electorate to make a choice among the candidates presented to them in a given election. He further pointed out that there are basically two forms of election: direct and indirect election. He noted that direct election is a method through which the electorate votes directly for their choice candidates; while indirect election is a process through which selected/elected political office holders vote through a process called the Electoral College.

Lawal (2020) argued that election is an essential necessary ingredient within a country practicing liberal democracy. He described an election as a democratic process that gives legitimacy and authority to those elected into power in a state. He pointed out that not all elections are conducted within the confines of democracy, and that undemocratic elections are capable of causing electoral conflict and the destabilization of the electoral system.

Relying on the above positions, it is right to say that elections can only be said to have been conducted within the ambit of democratic tenets when such elections are free, fair and transparent. And in any true democratic systems, elections must be conducted within a free, fair and transparent process without any undue interference or manipulation, as elections conducted within a peaceful, free and fair process will naturally ensure

legitimacy and the consolidation of the tenets of democracy, as there cannot be true democracy when elections are marred with irregularities and electoral manipulations, this is because election malpractice creates an enabling environment for election crisis and true democracy cannot thrive under an environment subsumed in crisis.

Concept of Democracy

According to Appadorai (1975), democracy is a system of government which gives citizens the opportunity to elect their political office holders either directly or indirectly who must be periodically elected within a specified term of office. Adayemo (2018) noted that democracy ensures that the fundamental human rights of the citizens are protected, rule of law is adhered to, equality of citizens is ensured, popular participation is promoted, healthy competition is encouraged, a multiparty system is instituted and the machinery for socio-political and economic development of the society is ascertained.

For Bako (2019), democracy is a process where the government creates an enabling environment and good conditions that will ensure that citizens of the state enjoy their fullest freedom and fundamental human rights, enabling them to actualize their innate potential capabilities that will make it possible for them to be able to actualize their goals and objectives within the society.

Ajayi (2020) opine that every true democracy must embrace popular participation, ensure healthy competition among contending choices, the enjoyment of civil and political liberty, and the accountability of the leaders to the citizens. Political participation in this context means the citizens of the state must be provided with a protective right to be able to decide on the means or method of electing or selecting their leaders through the conduct of a free, fair and credible election that will ensure the emergence of credible representatives of the people to handle the affairs of government on behalf of the citizens. And there is this innate psychological fulfillment when the people believe that the political leaders that emerges through an election is actually their choice, as it will ensure the active cooperation of the citizens, which will invariably metamorphose to economic and political development of the state.

It is therefore right to describe democracy as a vehicle through which human development can be achieved, and there cannot be development in an environment where the citizens are resisting cooperating with their leaders in government. While Western societies have been able to sustain and consolidate democratic principles in their countries, which has also helped them to achieve great political and economic development, the same thing cannot be said of developing countries like Nigeria, where democracy have been observed and practiced in breach and economic and political underdevelopment have become two major challenges retarding the growth of the country.

Concept of Democratic Consolidation

Democratic Consolidation is achieved through the acceptance of the democratic process instituted within a given society. It is a process wherein the democratic tenets being practiced is accepted by the people as the most appropriate for the betterment of the society,

more than other alternatives provided for them (Diamond, 2019). In the view Bextham (2019) posits that democracy can best be consolidated when the people believe in the democratic process enshrined in the society that is capable of withstanding any challenge that may emanate from the electoral process instituted in the system, especially one which gives them the political freedom to choose their leaders and also have the capacity to accommodate positive views and principles within the system.

According to Oguaye, (2020), the process of consolidating democracy begins with the inauguration of a new administration after there must have been a free, fair and transparent election that produced leaders of government in the society. Consolidation of democracy can be likened to the transition of an authoritarian regime to a democratic system which establishes a stable institutional and lasting democracy. Holistically, democracy can be consolidated when the probability of a breakdown of law and order is very low; that is, where the probability of consolidating the tenets of democracy is very high. In other words, the consolidation of democracy can be achieved where all relevant observers, which include major political actors in the system, the public and academic experts have a high expectation of a democratic administration with a foreseeable future, thereby having the capability to build a bridge against the failure of the tenets of democracy (Baker, 2020).

THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

Group Theory

Group theory explains the importance of a group in the government process which includes the electoral process that forms the integral part in the consolidation of democratic tenets. In this context, the examination of election crisis which is usually being carried out by a group, a political party, or supporters of a given political party, political thugs, voters, etc. who are behind the perpetuation of electoral crisis revolves around an identified group.

Within the ambit of group theory, the frustration-aggression theory tends to explain the major reasons behind the nature of aggression being perpetuated by the people during the electioneering period. In line with this study, the manifestation of election crisis which propels aggression by the people is as a result of election manipulation and fraud being perpetuated during the cause of election. Therefore, the group theory and frustration-aggression theory have the capability of providing insight to this study.

In the view of Bentlay (1975), the interest of an organized group decides if democratic tenets will be consolidated or not. The fundamental presupposition that propels the achievement of the desire of a group, with the combination of strenuous efforts dissipated in the formation and existence of a group behaviour tends to influence the outcome of things, such as, policies or decisions rather than that of individual disposition.

According to Gur (1970), the potential for collective violence that may mar the consolidation of democracy is being averred by relative deprivation of able bodied youths in the society. Relative deprivation which is anchored in frustration tends to predict the outcome of collective crisis or election violence being perpetuated by a social group. That

is, when a group of people have a cause to perceive that they are being deprived from achieving their set goal, their frustration is likely to metamorphose into aggression.

From the foregoing, it is understood that election violence do not just happen without a cogent reason. Election violence is a manifestation where a group of persons have become frustrated with the system in place. This frustration may occur in different forms; such as where voters have become frustrated when their votes are stolen or manipulated or where they are being prevented from voting for a candidate of their choice in an election, as has become a prevalent occurrence in most elections in Nigeria.

Also, political parties may exhibit traits of frustration when the electoral mandate given to them is either being stolen or manipulated or where they are being prevented from achieving their electoral goals. In such instance, the exhibited frustration from such political party may easily lead to anger and heightened tension, which may lead to election crisis. Most of the election crisis that have occurred in Nigeria are resultant effect of election rigging and manipulation which eventually leads to election crisis, which have the capability of truncating the political stability of the country.

ELECTION VIOLENCE AND DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION

Election is one of the key ingredients towards the achievement and sustainability of democratic consolidation in any modern society that has adopted democracy as its system of governance. This invariably implies that the key element towards ensuring the equality of every citizens in a democratic society is simply related through making sure that the votes of the electorates must count which has to be demonstrated through a free, fair and credible process of an election in line with the dictates of the constitution of the country, and in the case of Nigeria, the Electoral Act (Alemika, 2019).

Election violence is the application or the use of force by either supporters of a particular political party, hired machineries or thugs with the sole purpose of disrupting the smooth flow of an election process through the intimidation of political opponents, voters from casting their votes for their choice candidates as was witnessed in different election centres during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. Such undemocratic actions can serve as threat towards the consolidation of democracy in any modern society (Uwuh, 2023).

Democratic consolidation can only be achieved when political actors and the citizens decided to abide by the extant rules and laws guiding the electoral process during an election in the state. And where there is grievance held against the election by any of the contesting parties or candidates, such grievance is settled through the constitutional stipulated process. This simply describes the ethos and tenets of a democratic system (Agumba, 2020). It is therefore right to argue that election violence and democratic consolidation are antithetical to each other and cannot walk in the same line. Hence, democracy as is being understood can only be consolidated within an atmosphere of peace devoid of violence and rancor of any kind.

Unfortunately, election violence has become a recurrent event in every election held from 2003 to date, thereby, threatening the expected consolidation of Nigeria nascent

democracy. The Nigeria electoral process that has been designed to consolidate democracy in the country has been badly managed and its essential ingredients have been sacrificed on the altar of desperation, manipulation and election violence. Elections in Nigeria have been subjected to various forms of manipulation which has led to violence, and this has put a great question mark on the legitimacy of political leaders that have eventually emerged through such failed process. And political leaders who have come to power through this failed process can only but continue to encourage election manipulation, thereby making electoral fraud an accepted norm in the system, and such unfortunate action cannot help in the consolidation of democracy in the country (Amadi, 2022).

CAUSES OF ELECTION VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

Winner takes it all Mentality: Lawal (2010) is of the view that political parties and politicians, particularly in Nigeria have engaged in electioneering campaigns and voting process in ways that have suggested that every desperate means must be employed to achieve victory at the poll at all cost, as they perceive losing in an election as an abominable act which must be resisted with all their might, strength and even act of desperation. This is coupled with the fact that politicians who lose in an election are considered irrelevant by their political parties after the election and are also shut out of power by the party that emerges victorious at the end of the day. This unfortunate practice has far reaching political implications as it propels politicians into resolving to apply every available means within their reach as to emerge victorious in every election.

Sit Tight Syndrome: This unfortunate syndrome has destroyed the main idea of political principles and norms as has been seen in the case of Nigeria where politicians do everything within their powers to remain within the corridors of power. It breeds and encouraged *godfatherism* in politics, where political office holders after serving their term in office employ every manipulative means to install their stooge and loyalists in power, just to remain relevant in the system. It has also been discovered that most political leaders in their attempt to remain in power often create crisis during election period. They employ the services of political thugs and political praise singers who continue to sing their praise, intimidate and even kill anyone who disagrees with their view (Nnaji, 2020)

Poverty and Unemployment: The high level of poverty and unemployment in Nigeria has made election violence and manipulation an easy venture, as citizens who are hungry and desperate to have something to feed on will readily go to any extreme mile as to engage in election violence for any amount readily given to them to do the bidding of their political paymasters (Chima, 2020)

EFFECTS OF ELECTION VIOLENCE ON DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN NIGERIA

Election violence has become a major hindrance to the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria, right from when the country gained her independence from colonial masters-Britain. It is one of the reasons the military has held as a major reason in its intervention in the democratic process of the country over the years, and may be a factor for

a future military intervention in the present democratic process in the country (David, 2022).

The manipulation of elections in Nigeria and attendant violence that have greeted the electoral process in the country in recent time has become very worrisome and troubling. There is a great fear that incessant electoral violence has become an integral process of elections in Nigeria which may truncate the consolidation of democracy in the country (Obot, 2022). The present realities in Nigeria electoral process that is enveloped in election violence and manipulation cannot guarantee the consolidation of the tenets of democratic consolidation in the country (Ahmed, 2022).

Election violence and manipulation in itself retards political, economic and social growth and development, hence it causes insecurity of lives and properties as many citizens of the country and foreign investors will remain scared of investing their hard earned resources in such an economy (Obot, 2022). It has been noted that democracy when properly consolidated will guarantee security and the consolidation of the democratic process of a country, as democracy cannot thrive in an environment of crisis and violence; that is to say that election violence is capable of creating an unstable society and political instability (Adamu, 2022).

Election violence can lead to inter-party and intra-party crisis, and if not well managed can cause breakdown of law and order, and this will invariably affect the consolidation of democracy in any given society. Therefore, it will be right to say that election violence can destroy democracy and its tenets and affect the process of consolidation of democracy in any given society; this is because democracy cannot be consolidated in an environment where there is crisis.

METHODOLOGY

The study will be adopting document analysis method of data collection and analysis. The methodology is an arm of the qualitative method of data collection and analysis, and it requires the review and analyzing of relevant literatures, media reports, academic journals, newspaper and magazine publications, seminar presentations to gain additional insight in the nature and practice of democracy, election and democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This paper has painstakingly taken a cursory look at democracy, election and the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria with special concern to the democratic process of the Fourth Republican Nigeria. This study was able to establish that there have been wanton cases of electoral violence in the country capable of truncating the consolidation of democracy; this was aligned with the fraudulent electoral process that have become the bane of the several elections that have been held in the country from 1999 to date (2023). And the unfortunate scenarios that have played out with attendant electoral violence have subjected the Nigeria electoral process to mockery.

The study was able to establish that Nigeria politicians have made the electoral process to be seen as an undemocratic process where a winner must have to emerge through a desperate and fraudulent process. The manipulation of election results have become a norm and acceptable process in the country, and electoral violence has become an expected practice in every election held in the country; and this has placed a serious question mark on the possibility of consolidating democracy in Nigeria.

The study was able to note that the process of consolidation of democracy requires a peaceful, credible, free and fair electoral process in the country; and this will help to build the confidence of the electorates as a means of consolidating and sustaining the democratic process in the country. On this premise, the study has made the following recommendations:

The constitution of Nigeria and the Electoral Act should be holistically reviewed where the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should be seen and perceived to be truly independent, and should not be a tool in the hand of desperate political actors in the country to have the influence and capability of influencing the outcome of the electoral process. Hence, INEC must be seen as an impartial body that will engender confidence in the electorates and the citizens of the country.

The electoral umpire must have to make adequate provision where electoral materials needed for the conduct of the elections must have to arrive at polling units on time as to avoid the disenfranchisement of electorates. This should be done through a constant review of voters register as to ensure that qualified voters are allowed to cast their votes during any stipulated election in the country. And the electoral umpire must make proper arrangement of recruiting credible and capable electoral personnel who must have been adequately trained to be able to handle the electoral process in a free, fair and credible manner.

The Nigeria political class must be educated to change their mentality of wining an election through desperate means and process, where those in power are being influenced to apply desperate means to retain power at all cost, and where the opponents will also be forced to apply same desperate means to unseat the government in power. This can be achieved through proper electoral education by the electoral umpire and other government agencies involved.

Nigeria politicians must learn to imbibe the spirit of tolerance, maturity and the accommodation of the views of opposition parties. Political actors in the country must learn to embrace dialogue and peaceful process as veritable tools of resolving electoral disagreements. This will help to solve the challenges of electoral defeat, rancor and bitterness that have prevailed in the country's electoral process over the years.

The Nigerian government must learn to prosecute all offenders and perpetrators of electoral violence and manipulation in the country, regardless of their political affiliation, to serve as a deterrent to future electoral offenders in the country.

The government must have to create employment opportunities as a means of reducing the high level of poverty that has enveloped the youths in the country, who have made themselves ready tools for the perpetuation of electoral violence and manipulation that have undermined the credibility of the electoral process in the country.

Finally, it has been established that true democracy will bring about peaceful co-existence of the citizens of the country and economic and political developments; hence, there is a need for political actors in the country to embrace peace and reject electoral conflicts so as to consolidate the hard-earned democratic process in the country.

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