

2015 GUBERNATORIAL ELECTION AND DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN EBONYI STATE

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Abstract

The broad task of this paper was to examine 2015 gubernatorial election and democratic consolidation in Ebonyi State Nigeria. The paper interrogated the outcomes of the 2015 gubernatorial elections and democratic consolidation in Ebonyi state. Ebonyi as a young state was seriously facing the challenges of good governance and democratic consolidation from its creation in 1996 to the present day. The outcomes of the 2015 general elections made it possible that the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) had landslide victory, and is in control of the state. The PDP led government in the state was finding difficult to address the challenges facing the state such as payment of the new minimum wage, poverty, and unemployment. The party in power has through the institution of the State House of Assembly amended local government and development centre laws to suit the prebendalist leadership style without considering the implications of the amendment on the democratic consolidation. So the manner in which the present government in Ebonyi state controlled the administration of the state, posed difficult for democracy to be consolidated. The paper adopted the Marxian theoretical perspective in analysing the study. The findings showed that the outcomes of the 2015 general elections were not truly reflecting the will and the expectation of the people, and so democratic consolidation appeared a mirage in the state. It recommended that elections should be staggered to enable INEC and other electoral institutions to ensure free, fair and credible outcomes in the future elections in Nigeria.

Keywords: Gubernatorial, election, democratic consolidation, Ebonyi State.

Introduction

The present Fourth Republic is a child of myriad fortunes and misfortunes attempting to establish or derail the democratic consolidations in Nigeria. Over the years, democratic consolidation suffered a chequered history with intermittent military rule ranging from the 1959 to the conduct of 1998/99 general elections in Nigeria (Aro,2013, p.436). What is happening now is not how to democratise the polity under military order, but to democratise the current trends and structures of democracy, which is repugnant to democratic values. One of these structures is the role political parties play in democratic consolidation and maintenance of democracy in the country.

With the advent of democracy in Nigeria in 1999, there were aspirations and hopes that democracy has returned amidst despair, economic stagnation, despondency

and evident structural violence in the country. As the military class departed the political setting, the civilian ruler kick started the process of democratic entrenchment, making it possible that democracy continue to endure permanently in the country. However, this process of democratic consolidations has been contradicted with a number of problems particularly the poor outcome of electoral contests always imbued with electoral fraud. Political violence has remained another critical challenge from the First Republic to the contemporary time in Nigeria (Ikpe, 2011, p.23).

Virtually, all republics in Nigeria preceding this Fourth Republic have had wanton level of violence and fraud casting impug on the credibility of the outcome. So the events of political conflicts and violence are direct reproduction of what has happened in the past in Nigeria. Many states of the federation have experienced one form of political violence or the other.

It still requires strong democratic institutions and democrats with the appropriate democratic value orientations, commitment, patience, and resilience to make these institutions sustainable. The efforts to build these pillars are confronted and challenged by substantial threats, which manifest themselves, for example, in the reckless misrule by elected officials, corrupt practices by public officials, insensitivity to and intolerance to opposing views and perspective, communal and ethno-religious conflicts and general insecurity of lives and property, all of which create apprehensions about the possibility of authoritarian reversal (Jega, 2007, p.67). It is apparently clear that while Nigeria is still subsisting as a nation state, the problem of democratic consolidation continues to threaten the country, thereby creating the avenue for political violence to thrive across the federation. Political parties and her members geared towards the General Elections with high level of insecurity and violence.

Ebonyi State of Nigeria, which is the focal point of this study, was among the states created on 1st October, 1996 by General Sani Abacha. It was created out of old Enugu and Abia States. It has thirteen local government areas, twenty-four House of Assembly constituencies, six federal constituencies, and three senatorial constituencies. It will be recalled that Ebonyi state had short days of military rule before the return of democracy in 1999. Ebonyi State is predominantly occupied by the Wawa speaking people of contemporary Nigeria. In all, there are nine major languages spoken in Ebonyi State: Afikpo, Mgbo, Izzi, Ezza, Ikwo, Kukele, Legbo, Mbembe, and Oring. Ebonyi State can be categorised into about three cultural zones based on the local dialectical and choreographic patterns, namely Abakaliki, Afikpo and Ohaozara (Otu, 2012, p.78). The politics of Ebonyi State since inception of democracy in 1999 has revolved around the structural and cultural pattern of the state with its consequences on democratic consolidation. The implication is that the zoning arrangement of the PDP was not respect, given the fact that Northern part is the majority. It is in the light foregoing that the paper attempts to dissect the outcome of 2015 general election in the present era of democratic order, and how these impinge on the desire for democratic consolidation in Ebonyi state of Nigeria.

Election and Electionerring Campaign

In political science literatures scholars have written extensively on the concept of elections with the inundations of the extant scholarship with the definitions of election. The universality and ideals of democracy have made this imperative. This is because good and successful electoral processes are the hallmarks and cornerstone of democracy. Elections are central to the existence, stability and development of democracies, and political parties play significant roles in such democracies (Nwolise 1988, p.35). It is also central to the study of democratic practices and certainly one the most crucial and contentious issues in political science (Shugart, 2006, p.90).

The Encyclopaedia of the social sciences captures elections as the process of selecting the officers or representatives of an organisation or group by the votes of its qualified members. Election is the choosing of a person or persons in a representative government by a group in a political society or community. It helps a political society to give its will through participation in selecting its top contenders and subjecting such representatives in government to accountability (Eke, 2014, p.214). The essence of elections cannot be overemphasised in a democratic society; where the legitimacy of government is fundamentally determined by whether the outcome of elections truly reflects the wishes and aspirations of the people. Election remains the process of political participation, choice, legitimacy, and accountability in democratic governance. It could be then averred that if an election must follow a process, it has to conform to the activities defined and guided by law from pre-election planning, execution up until the post election disputes resolution by the court of law and judicial tribunals (Eke 2014, p.214).

It follows that elections when properly situated in context of the above definitions, there is no gain saying the fact that Nigeria elections are lacking the credibility indexes and parameters. The electoral processes are fraught with irregularities, fraud and violence characterising the three stages of elections namely: pre-election, election and post election stages. Electoral institutions and other relevant agencies that are constitutionally empowered to organise and execute laws and rules are grossly weak. The judicial tribunals are usually pawns in the hands of the marauding and desperate politicians for their selfish ends. Adjudging elections to be free and fair in Nigeria is ridiculous at the moment, and it has to be nurtured on the anvil and ingredients of democracy.

Democracy and Democratic Consolidation

Looking into prior studies tracing the provenance of democracy, and its philosophical adumbrations is not daunting than attempting to conceptualise democracy with its correlates democratic consolidation. As democracy evolved and spread worldwide and as the dominant system of political organisations in modern state, attempts to conceptualise and theorise it have become too amorphous and imprecise with the result that democracy has become a heavily contest albeit over flogged concept (Jega, 2007, P.14). As there are confusions and contradictions in defining the concept of democracy, so arriving at the ground of democratic

consolidation is obfuscated and byzantine in the scholarship. Scholars of diverse intellectual persuasion and paradigmatic orientation have attempted to discuss the parameters of democratic consolidation. The polemic needs not detain and belabour us here.

Democratic consolidation involves political and social freedoms that are minimally necessary not only during, but also between elections as a condition for election to be free and competitive (O'Donnell, 1996, P.35). It will be recalled that O'Donnell's appreciation of democratic consolidation falls in tandem with one of the tenets of liberal democracy. Liberal democracy is predicated on the following principles such as: basic freedoms are guaranteed, universal suffrage exists, multiparty system, equality before law, popular representations, governance is based on the rule of law, periodic, free and fair elections are held. These features characterise the advance democracies. The crucial and fundamental question that keeps coming and agitates the mind of many people is whether democracy in Nigeria is liberal or guide democracy? The conduct of the 2015 general elections is devoid of the indexes of liberal democracy. It was true the election has been relatively competitive and transition sustained overtime in Nigeria but the 2015 general was flawed by electoral fraud and violence. From the constitutional dimension, democracy is consolidated when all actors in the polity become habituated to the fact that political conflict within the state will be resolved according to established norms, and that violations of these norms are likely to be both ineffective and costly (Ikpe, 2011, p. 2).

As the challenges for democratic consolidation continue to attract wide interest of scholars to mean the institutionalisation of democratic cultures and democratisation of the civil rule contradictory practices, so when democracy is consolidated, it becomes legitimate in the perception and estimation of the citizens. Consolidation is the process of achieving broad and legitimation, such that all significant political actors, at both the elite and mass level, believe that the democratic regime is better for their society than any other realistic alternative they can imagine (Ikpe, 2011,p.2). In the society of the bottom billion, what is paramount is not democratic consolidation, but the violent quest for power dominates the political system (Collier, 2010, p.15). The manifest destiny of democratic consolidation is the practice of good governance. There is a strong link between good governance and democratic consolidation. It can be said that the more purposeful, focused and concerted the move towards good governance under civilian dispensation, defined in terms of transparency, and accountability of public officials, responsible conduct, as well as their responsiveness to the demands, needs and aspirations of the governed the greater the chances of successful democratic transition and consolidation (Jega, 2007, p.142). In the opinion of this paper, democratic consolidation remains the transformation and sustain of democratic ethos to bring about good governance. So this subscribes to the thesis that democratic consolidations falls in tandem and correlates with governance. Therefore, without good governance, there is no democratic consolidation.

Post-Colonial State Character of the Nigerian State and the Trajectories of Election

Tracing the history of elections and democratic practices, one would quickly cast his mind back to colonial epoch. It is a wrong historical epithet to describe autochthonous Africa states as without the mode of conducting elections into monarchical stools, and vacant positions prior to the advent of imperialism and colonialism. This is not the body of the polemic that this paper presents and anchors.

The history of elections in Nigeria dates to 1922, when the Clifford Constitution was made with limited adult suffrage excluding women, but allowing only men adult Nigerians the right to vote and be voted for. The constitutional framework permitted Nigeria's first competitive election of 1923 in which the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) emerged victoriously under Herbert Macaulay as flag bearer and, by extension, became the ruling party (Eke, 2014, p.216). It will be recalled that NNDP could not survive given the ethnic fissiparous tendencies that tore the party apart; giving rise to formation of Lagos Youth Movement and subsequently the Nigeria Youth Movement in 1937.

Consequently, the Pandora box of ethnicity in Nigeria electoral practices metamorphosed in the formation, National Council of Nigeria and Cameroun (NCNC) in 1944, Action Group (AG) in 1948, and Northern Peoples Party (NPC). These parties contested various elections before the 1959 general election. Given, the preponderance of ethnicity in Nigeria, the election outcomes from 1922 suffered bias and manipulation in the nation's electoral history.

Again, in the 1959 election, the British rigged the process to plant a pliant political leader who would protect her economic interest on the heels of colonial administration in Nigeria (Eke, 2014, p.217). It was shown in the annals that a courageous English junior civil servant named Harold Smith had been used by James Roberston to oversee the rigging of Nigeria's first country wide election, so that its compliant friends in the northern Nigeria would win power, dominate the country, and serve the British interests after independence (Achebe, 2012, p. 51). Taking from the assertions above, it is not far to establish that ethnic discord and electoral manipulation was sown by the British continue to subsist thereby presenting unacceptable electoral outcomes in the country.

Also, the electoral institution imbued and saddled with responsibility of conducting elections into various elective positions has undergone transformation. The First Republican constitution recognised Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) under the leadership of Mr. E.F. Esua to supervise and conduct the 1964 general elections. The existence of FEDECO lasted, when it conducted the 1979 and 1983 general elections. The military regime under General Ibrahim Babangida changed FEDECO to National Electoral Commission (NEC). It became National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON) under the regime of General Sani Abacha, and subsequently in 1998 became Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). It will be recalled that all elections in Nigeria ranging 1964, 1979, 1983, 1993, 1998/9, 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015 general elections have been conducted by the electoral body now called INEC.

The character of the political elite goes a long way in determining the tone of democratic practices. The unity of the elite mainly in the party institution is indispensable in any political system. Analysis of Nigerian politics indicates that political elites are egregiously divided along ethnic and religious lines when it comes to politics (Ikpe, 2011, p.10). From the First Republic, it has been very difficult for the political elite to arrive at a consensus on national issues. Exacerbation of ethnic division has thrown up agitation for rotational presidency, and application of the federal character principle in order to accommodate the dominated minority in filling government offices. In order to render nullity the effects of ethnicity, it became imperative the need to ensure balancing in filling political offices especially the presidency as the arrowhead of the institutional representation of the state (Wale, 1996, p.137). There is the struggle of the north/south divide on the presidential seat of Nigeria. The continuous reflection of ethnicity for leadership and political appointment makes mockery and charade of democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

Lack of elite consensus continues to manifest tremendously in states in Nigeria. It was obvious and manifest in the 2015 general elections in Ebonyi state. The major political parties in the state APC, PDP, and LP had elite disunity leading to mass defection and carpet crossing among the parties. The personalisation of power and overbearing interest of the elite in PDP tore the party apart. The emergence of Labour Party was as result of crisis in PDP, when the sitting Governor lost in the Nov, 2014 party primaries. Crisis and conflict resulting from lack of consensus of political elite fuelled the incidences of electoral violence in the 2015 general elections. The LP had two senatorial candidates laying claim of the party ticket during the March 28 Presidential and National Assembly elections. The consistent lack of elite unity slows the growth of democracy.

Political parties are engines of democracy and political transitions in the state. Their roles are fundamental in the survival and sustenance of democracy in all societies. The quest for power sometime makes political parties to take various forms and characters depending on the development of political and democratic institutions. Hegemonic parties appear in a situation, where the overriding interest of elite predominates over the fundamental state, thereby down playing masses oriented development and good governance in the state. Hegemonic parties are political parties that are dominant in the control of votes cast in elections in a state. Their dominance arises not so much from popular support, but rather, from their control of the machinery of election. The tendency of this development is great in Nigeria Ikpe (2011:14). Nigeria from 1960 has experienced party hegemonism. In 1979 return of democracy, the National Party of Nigeria dominated the political system until 1983, when the military took over the reins of government.

Also, in the 1999 transition to democracy, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) won the presidential seat and took hold of many states of the federation. It is important to note that the domination of one party in a state for a long time negates the basic tenet of allowing opposition to thrive. A more disturbing consequence as far as democratic consolidation is concerned is the weakening of other parties. In 2003 there were 32 registered parties, and one party won in 28 out of the 36 states. In the

practice of liberal democracy, the presence of opposition party shows a pointer that democracy is being consolidated in a state. The dominance of PDP in Nigeria in the recent time has given room to number of social vices and political underdevelopment. It is obvious that APC won the last presidential election, which was the first time in the history of Nigeria. The growth and consolidation of democracy is being assessed based on how power exchanges hand among the political parties.

In Ebonyi state the dominance of one party –the PDP reigns supreme since 1999 general election. The PDP has been in control of the state without brooking opposition. It was in 1998 local general election that APP won two local government chairmanship positions in the state. In 2011 general election ANPP won one federal constituency, and two State House of Assembly constituencies in Ebonyi North Senatorial Zone. In an ace of victory, the PPA won one House of Assembly election. In total assessment of party politics in Ebonyi state, it is glaring that opposition party has no place. The PDP remains in firm control of the political machinery as intimidating and marauding instrument to the people. It is clear that one party in control hampers the growth of democracy.

Popular participation and legitimacy of democracy are the major indexes of measuring democratic development and consolidation in a state. It involves wide spread believe in the appropriateness and adequacy of specific democratic rules, practices and procedures at the mass and elite level. But in Nigeria, although democracy as a system of rule has become generally acceptable, yet it exists principally at the level of the state (Ikpe, 2011:9). The electoral and participatory democracy has been hijacked by the elite interest by alienating the masses through election rigging, fraud and electoral violence. The masses are not consulted during critical decision making within and outside the political parties. Given the fact that the masses are alienated from electoral and political process, it became evident that the people see election not as a process to be used in changing government policies to their benefits. Election is rather seen as an opportunity to manipulate their communal elite members into political offices of the state. In addition, the masses, in particular, see election as the period to extract their own share of state largesse from politicians, who are usually negligent and non-responsive to the masses once elected into office (Ikpe, 2011, p.9).

While the practice of democracy subsists in Nigeria by way of unbroken civilian to civilian transition from 1999 till date; Nigerians are yet to attain to the desirable and popular involvement in electoral process akin to mature democracies. Liberal democracy obtains where the following minimal conditions flourish, they include basic freedoms are guaranteed, universal suffrage exists, multiparty system operates, periodic, free and fair elections are held, and governance is based on the rule of law. These features are not fully practised in Nigeria. Substantive democracy goes beyond the formal trappings of democratic political system (such as multipartism and elections) to include such elements as accountability and genuine popular participation in the nation's political and economic decision making processes (Martin, 1993,p.7). Accountability and popular participation are the big issues and puzzles that burden the political system in Nigeria, and Ebonyi state is not

an exception. Fraud and electoral violence featured in the last election in Ebonyi state. This confirms the fact that democratic consolidation is still yet to stabilise in the state. Diamond (1994) argues that popular legitimation of democracy entails habitual acceptance of democratic procedures which focus not so much on the outcomes but the rules and methods of political competition. The rules and methods of political competitions are overtly subverted and corrupted during the last general elections in Ebonyi state. At this juncture the paper turns to consider the outcome of 2015 general elections in the state.

2015 Gubernatorial Election Conduct and Democratic Consolidation in Ebonyi State

The 2015 general election was held in March 28 and April 11 for Presidential and National Assembly, and Governorship and State House of Assembly elections respectively. In both elections, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) had a landslide victory by winning the governorship seat and twenty-three out of twenty-four state constituencies. The National Assembly elections were also won by the PDP in the state. As the party has commenced her rulership of the state under leadership Chief David Nwaeze Umahi, the state within the period is passing through a number of difficulties. Even though, there are meretricious and cosmetics sign of infrastructural fixing in the state capital like the completion of street light previously stated by past administration, and the maintenance of roads in Abakaliki. The people are yet to see a drastic and fundamental approach to address the infrastructural challenges in the state.

The governance problem confronting the state following the emergence of the PDP under Chief David Nwaeze Umahi, the state has been facing legitimacy crisis in the face of the anti-people's law being made by the State House Assembly. The amendment of Local Government and Development Laws are stripping the people benefits of government while empowering leadership prebendal posture to prey and predate on the people. The making and coming into place of the property tax law and high toll at the motor parks in Abakaliki is making the life of ordinary Ebonyians miserable. The workers' welfare is undermined by the slashing of pay from the salary they received before the government came into place. Obviously, the government is lacking legitimacy at the moment as people are expressing their pent up animosity. Life is harsh as people embark on strike to press home their grievances. The workers have gone on strike, and taken their case against state government to Industrial Court. The private transport owners have equally embarked on strike on 28th October, 2015. In assessing democratic consolidation following the outcome of 2015 general elections shows that the government is lacking legitimacy. The continuation of the major project embarked upon by the past government is set aside without genuine reasons. Although, this is not peculiar to Ebonyi state as projects are abandoned throughout the federation. This culture defines the degree of poor political culture and democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The nexus between good governance and democratic consolidation is strong in that both coalesce to bring about development and wellbeing of the people. Ebonyi state within 19 years of socio-political existence is in dire need of democratic consolidation. The paper has tested and weighed certain variables like tolerance to opposition, legitimation and observance of the rule of law. The findings show that party hegemonism orchestrated by PDP and its drive to hold on to power produced electoral violence in the last elections, which negates democratic consolidation.

The governance problem looms high as the effects of the anti-people's law are biting on the people. People are resorting to strike and protest to make the government change her draconian laws in the state. The outcome of 2015 general election in the opinion of this paper is not favourable to Ebonyians at the movement. There is hue and cry in the streets of Ebonyi state. Expectation is still high on the government. The study recommended that INEC should rise to her responsibility by ensuring that the wishes of the people, and not the elite.

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