

Consolidation of Democracy in West Africa: A Case Study of Nigeria's Electoral Institutions

Afolabi Adebayo Kehinde

Abstract:- West Africa like other regions of Africa has undergone unprecedented changes in relation to the democratic process. Between the 1980s and 1990s, discussions and commentaries on democratic process in Africa were dominated by the controversy over the respective influence of external and internal factors that triggered this historical phenomenon. Almost three decades after the end of the Cold War, the state of democracy in West Africa could be best described through the metaphor of a glass half full or empty. Nigeria so far has experienced two decades of uninterrupted democracy and democratic transition from a military regime to a democratic regime from 1999 to date. However, history of failed elections has eroded public confidence in the electoral institutions, a challenge that has antagonized Nigeria's democracy and has contributed to the country's democratic regression.

This study was designed to examine the roles of the electoral institutions in consolidating democracy in West Africa. (A Case Study of Nigeria electoral institution). As it is, democracy in Africa faces the risk of being trapped in the electoral fallacy. Regular elections take place, but the democratic franchise has not become sufficiently diffused and entrenched as a mode of governance across political and social institutions. Therefore, it becomes interesting to examine the role of electoral institutions in consolidating and deepening democracy in Nigeria. The study, therefore, will use phenomenological research design that has the formed pattern of a qualitative research strategy to ascertain the empirical facts.

I. INTRODUCTION

Democracy as a system of government is considered one of the most acceptable forms of governance through which any contemporary society can be guaranteed peaceful coexistence (Abegunde, 2016). The word democracy is an elusive term, which defies precise definition. It is often described according to Lincolnian definition as "government of the people, by the people, and for the people." Democracy in our modern world is flawed because of its attempt to imitate an Athenian antecedent whose main features remain impracticable in contemporary political life (Bolaji, 2013). In a true democratic system, all institutions the legislature, the executive, the judiciary, and their agencies are subordinated to achieving the equality of its citizens in enjoying their fundamental human rights and ensuring their political participation, largely through their elected representatives (Fukuyama, 2014). Additionally, democracy is a system of elected representative government operated under the rule of law, where the most significant groups in the population participate in the political process and have access to effective representation in the practice of

making governmental decisions for the allocation of scarce resources (Friedman, 2011). Therefore, democracy may not be secure because its strength lies in the possibility of effective and strong institutions in accordance with prevailing socio-political and economic conditions and realities (Abegunde, 2016).

Nigeria became a bastion of democracy in Africa following the country's independence from Britain in the year 1960. Unfortunately, after two decades of political independence, Nigeria has failed to practice and deliver dividends of liberal democracy to her citizens (Akubo, 2004). In Nigeria, Democracy is like Siamese twins though conjoined but uncomfortable and under intense pressure that could result in all forms of hurt, even death (IBOI, 2009). The country is yet to walk and can barely stand alone as a democratic nation (Abegunde, 2016). One of the reasons for this state of affairs is evident in the country's electoral institution which is supposed to be a bedrock in sustaining democracy but instead has been eroded with malpractices unaccountability and corruption by the ruling elite in the country (Abegunde, 2016). Since the Post-Cold War transition from single-party to multiparty systems, most African countries have embraced elections as their preferred option for power transfer (Fjelde, 2014). The quest for competitive elections in Africa with the modest gains made since the 1990s toward deepening democratization continues to underpin the continent's efforts to create stable and growing democracies. In the past two decades, Africa has made commendable progress in democratic institution-building and practices. The continent continues to witness peaceful transfers of power through regular elections and increased establishment of independent election management bodies (EMBs) This is coupled with multiparty political systems that boost citizens' participation in political and electoral processes (Suna, 2017).

In the Introduction of the book *When Elephants Fight* Matlosa, (Khadiagala & Shale, 2010) argues 'the fact that elections can be used both to promote and to undermine democratic governance is a paradox which has given rise to a lot of questions about the value and meaning of election in Africa. African countries have in the past experience vote rigging and malpractices prevailed in the 1960s and 1970s. Elections in Africa were often followed by regime breakdown and violence that left many dead and others exiled (Aliyu, 2020). For instance, in 1966 then Ghanaian president Kwame Nkrumah, was removed from office by coups d'état, in reason to the electoral manipulation that underpinned his monopolization of power (Suna, 2017). While the number and regularity of elections in Africa have improved significantly since the early 2000s, there are many challenges that threaten the long-term sustainability of democracy on the continent. Reports show that in the year

2015 and the first quarter of 2016, 22 elections were in countries in Africa, notably, elections were relatively peaceful, free, and fair in Burkina Faso, Tanzania, and Zambia, and there were peaceful transitions from incumbents to opposition parties, but in Benin, Cape Verde and Nigeria, Burundi, Chad, Congo-Brazzaville, Equatorial Guinea, and Uganda the incumbents claimed victory amid controversy and irregularities in the elections by electoral institutions that resulted in violence (Omotola, 2010).

The concept of elections and the elective principle in Nigeria was introduced in 1922 by the British colonial administration. It was aimed at bringing governance to people at the grassroots people and expanding the frontiers of the colonial influence by encouraging local participation in governance and the decision-making process (Stanley, 2017). However, the first general election was held much later in 1959 which created political tension and social insecurity. Which also resurfaced in and also surfaced in the subsequent federal elections in 1964 and the regional elections in the West in 1965.

The military coup of 1966 and the chains of ugly events resulting from it cannot be disconnected from the 1965 regional election violence in the west. Since then, subsequent elections in Nigeria were held in the year 1979 and 1983, 1991 through 1993, when the military regime organized staggered elections, in a diarchic arrangement that resulted in the annulment of the June 12, 1993, presidential elections and in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015 have all been marred by election violence, resulting in mass deaths and destruction of property (Stanley, 2017).

The election conducted during the fourth republic in Nigeria in the year 1999, was inundated with spiraling malpractices in the electioneering process (Ojo, 2014). From 1999 to date, four different civilian administrations have emerged and there have been four successive transitions from one civilian government to another (Obasanjo Administration, 1999-2007 Yar'adua/Jonathan Administration, 2007-2011, Jonathan Administration, 2011 and Buhari 2015 up till date (Adeosun, 2014). The 2007-2011 election process was therefore described by international observers as fire by force among members of the political parties caused by irregularities and malpractices of the electoral commission according to AU officials.

There has been a reasonable level of consensus in popular discourse and scholarly writings that elections in Nigeria lag behind internationally acceptable standards of free, fair, and credible democratic practice. For instance, The European Union Election Observation Mission (EUEOM) in 2015 reported that card readers during the time of election malfunctioned in 18 percent of the polling units monitored, while in 91 percent of the polling units the cards were not able to consistently verify fingerprints (EUEOM.2105). However, in Nigeria election process is not an easy task. INEC understands that the outcome of an election is a critical measure of whether an election has been consolidated or reversed and whether, in general, Nigeria is making democratic progress (Orji, 2014). Studies have explored the role of these institutions as instruments used by

the political elite to consolidate and undermine democracy for an undemocratic regime, instead of making democracy immune from any authoritarian. While few attempts have been made to address the issues of political parties hidden under the shadow of elections through the electoral institution to achieve their political ambition. Therefore, the study will explore the role of electoral institutions in consolidating democracy in the country from 1999 to date and will establish the extent to which electoral institutions have helped to strengthen or retard democracy.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Nigeria has experienced two decades of uninterrupted democratic practices with regular elections as a requisite to achieved representative democracy as well as oversight functions in embracing the rule of law (TSAL, 2002). However, (Schmitter& Karl, 1999) in a famous critique conclude that there are several challenges confronting Nigeria's democracy that can be traced to the country electoral institution as a result of possible lack of autonomy, structure and measure for effective electoral processes. History of failed election have eroded public confidence in the country electoral process. Electoral fraud, malpractices votes buying, violence, rigging, intimidation, snatching of ballot boxes, falsification of result sheet, compilation of fake names, abuse of voter registration and official manipulation of election result in favor of a ruling political party among others (Adejumobi, 2006).

According to European Union Election Observer Mission to Nigeria, 2007: "It is sad and unfortunate that INEC has become part of the plot to scuttle our transition program and indeed, our hard-earned democracy, INEC has become an obstacle for free and fair elections, and we owe it a duty to the Nigerian people to check this executive interference in the work of the commission and urgently take steps to restore its independence and integrity". The electoral body is supposed to set the procedure, rules, and processes, and provide the institutional infrastructure and logistics for elections. In Nigeria, there is a paradox to the fate of electoral authorities. Electoral authorities often wear the official badge of "independence" in their names yet fail to live up to it (Festus, 2016). Electoral practices in Nigeria have contributed to the underdevelopment of the country not only because they contribute to instability in the social order but also because a government that rigs its way into power. Therefore, study will explore the role of electoral institution in consolidating democracy in the country since 1999 to date and will establish the extent to which electoral institution have helped to strengthen or retard democracy in.

III. ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN WEST AFRICA

The expectation in the democratic literature in the early 1990s was that the transitions to democracy and regular elections over time would lead to qualitatively improved institutions and democratic processes and that the new democratic institutions would increasingly enjoy local and international support. However, in West Africa, like other sub-Saharan Africa regions, it is commonly observed

that democracy has been consolidated in only a few countries. While few other countries, changes in party leadership and political successions appear increasingly to be rule-based and routinised. This has provided a degree of political stability that also has positive effects on other aspects of governance, such as the investment climate and state capacity to deliver public services. Although this judgement may be contested. (Gyimah-Boadi, 2001; Lindberg, 2003). Ghana is a good example of country with consolidating democracy in West Africa region.

Scholars and observers of West Africa affairs have discussed whether elections have been sufficiently institutionalized for democratic consolidation. Although the regularity of elections is becoming the norm, it is set against the backdrop of an authoritarian past which had initially subverted democratic practices. The reality suggests that elections are only an expedient political exercise for ruling regimes, partly because of their economic implications in terms of external aid flows and economic assistance, and partly because of their public relations advantage in propping up the political profile of the regime in the international arena' (Adejumobi, 2000). The view offered by Adejumobi has become the dominant norm, even in regimes that assume political power through democratic elections such as in Mali and Guinea-Bissau that reverted to an undemocratic regime in 2012. The development of democratic decline has also pervaded countries like Nigeria, Guinea, Mauritania, Niger, Togo, Burkina Faso and others because of the way ruling regimes are subverting democratic processes and procedures to hold on to power.

The current democratic experiment in the region of West Africa is devoid of 'genuine and legitimate democratic prospects, it is only manifesting in the phenomenon of vertical despotism because of the way electoral democracy is being subverted'. Thus, (Olukoshi, 2010) has been correct when he asserted in the 2007-2008 Governance Trends Report (GTR) that 'something is really missing about the quality of democracy in West Africa' (Olukoshi, 2010). The 'missing' part of elections in West Africa is the quality as fraudulent elections occur because of violation of democratic rules and procedures by political elites. On the other hand, evidence of democratic consolidation is declining due to military forces overthrowing elected governments. Furthermore, it is because of the perversion of democratic rules by governing political elites in order to hold on to power. In West Africa, while it can be argued that remarkable advancement has been made in the gradual institutionalization of liberal democracy under the third wave of democratization, however, it would be misleading to claim that liberal democracy is consolidating in the region.

IV. ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

Elections have been seen as central to competitive politics that guarantee political participation and competition, which in turn are pivotal to democratic transition and consolidation (Fukuyama, 2014). Elections are also central to the institutionalization of orderly succession in a democratic setting, creating a legal administrative framework for handling inter elite rivalries. They also provide a modicum of popular backing for new rulers. According to (Bratton, 2016), elections are important for the institutionalization of popular participation, competition, and legitimacy, and are core foundations of democracy. Bratton observes that the consolidation of democracy involves the widespread acceptance of rules to guarantee political participation and political competition. Elections which empower ordinary citizens to choose among contestants for top political offices clearly promote democracy. In Nigeria, elections have been one of the main problems of the democratization process. The country struggle to sustain democracy, good governance and development that have futile the country attempts of democratic transition. The collapse of the First (1960-6) and Second (1979-83) republics, and the abortion of the Third Republic through the criminal annulment of the 12 June 1993 presidential election, are clear indicators of the failure of previous attempts at democratization (Bratton, 1998).

After prolonged military rule spanning close to two decades (1983-99), characterized by the wanton violation and repression of the political, economic, and social rights of the people, the re-democratization process begun in 1999 which renewed expectations for the consolidation of democracy. According to (Bratton, 1998). The heart of these expectations lies the pertinent issue of elections. Electoral process of a country can only be meaningful and democratic only if they are free, fair, participatory, competitive, and legitimate (Bratton, 1998). This can only be possible when elections are administered by a neutral authority, also when electoral administration is sufficiently competent and resourceful to take specific precautions against fraud. Furthermore, electoral process can only be legitimate and impartial when contenders all have access to the public media, electoral districts and rules do not grossly handicap the opposition when the secret of the ballot is protected when virtually all adults can vote when procedures for organizing and counting the votes are widely known. This also include transparency and impartial procedures for resolving election complaints and disputes (Omotola 2010). It is therefore imperative to note that elections are not in themselves a guarantee for sustainable democracy and consolidation. Elections can also be used to disguise authoritarian rule, what (Schedler, 2017), called electoral authoritarianism under such circumstances, elections are only held as a transitional ritual where the people have little or no choice, as has been the case in many African country including Nigeria.

V. ELECTORAL INSTITUTIONS AND ELECTION PROCESSES

The importance of electoral governance defined as a wider set of activities that creates and maintains the broad institutional framework in which voting and electoral competition take place to democratic transition and consolidation cannot be overemphasized. Electoral governance is a comprehensive and multi-tasked activity involving the three levels which are rulemaking, rule application and rule adjudication (Birch, 2008). According to (Birch, 2008), discourse rulemaking involves designing the basic rules of the electoral game, rule application deals with implementing these rules to specifications to organize the electoral game and rule adjudication entails resolving disputes arising from the game. Electoral institution involves the interaction of constitutional, legal and institutional rules and organizational practices that determine the basic rules for election procedures and electoral competition, organize campaigns, voter registration, and election day tallies and resolve disputes and certify results. In these processes, the interplay of power structures and processes is central to electoral outcomes. As such, Electoral Member Board (EMBs) are part of a set of institutions and rules that together determine the probity of electoral processes, although in emerging democracies, where administrative processes are weak and distrust across political actors is high, their role at the center of electoral processes tends to be more (Lindberg, 2016).

In Nigeria, the primary responsibility of electoral administration rests with an EMB that has undergone several changes in nomenclature under different regimes, but not as much change in its structure. Between 1959 and 1999 the EMB was renamed six times. Before the civil war it was the Electoral Commission of Nigeria (ECN, 1959-63), then the Federal Electoral Commission (FEC, 1963-6). In the latter part of the 1970s it was the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO, 1976-9). During the Babangida regime (1986-93), it was renamed the National Electoral Commission (NEC). General Sani Abacha (1993-8) replaced the NEC with the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON), while General Abdusallami Abukakar, Abacha's successor (1998-9), rechristened it the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) (Ojo, 2011).

It has also been reconstituted endlessly in 1958, twice in 1963, 1964, 1977, 1981, 1989, 1993, 1994, 1998, 2000, and 2004. Despite these changes, the EMB has not been able to administer elections effectively, and its 'autonomy and capacity over the years have been under suspicious. Thus, whether electoral institution will contribute to democratic consolidation or regression will depend on the independence and professionalism of electoral institutions, particularly the EMB and INEC because institutional structures that promote a level playing field at each stage of the electoral process will enhance the extent to which voters perceive their elections to be.

VI. ELECTORAL INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA

A country electoral system is one of the most significant political institutions in terms of defining the strategic context of electoral competition. In the words of (Mozaffar, 2006), electoral systems structure political conflict over distributional outcomes in democratic politics. The choice of electoral laws, the method for translating votes into seats, has profound effects on patterns of political mobilization and representation in a democracy (Colomer, 2007). In theory, elections constitute a key pillar of democratic rule, by facilitating representation, ensuring accountability and peacefully regulating access to political power. Over the past two decades, nearly all Sub-Saharan African states adopted some form of electoral democracy in which the highest political offices are filled through regular, multiparty elections. Reason being that majoritarian party system is most commonly exercise as a single member plurality or absolute majority typically magnify the electoral success using the influence of the large parties.

Majoritarian electoral institutions further reinforce the stakes of electoral contest where electoral outcomes tend to disperse the nodes of political power across a broader range of groups (Fjelde, 2014). One of the advantages of majoritarian systems is the ability to produce a strong opposition party able to mount a credible threat to the incumbency that might sometimes heighten the risk of violence. Over time, the ability of majoritarian systems to facilitate strong parliamentary oppositions could provide a check on the government and thus facilitate democratic consolidation. By contrast rewarding the dominant party and introducing higher barriers for representation, pure majoritarian rules might lead minority parties to feel that they are underrepresented or even excluded from political power. Because they are designed to produce clear winners and decisive outcomes. Majoritarian electoral systems tend to heighten the stakes of electoral competitions that could result to violence (Festus, 2006). During this period the strength of electoral institutions motivates actors to comply with democratic rules and to accept electoral defeat because they convey a certainty that the losers will still be allowed to advance their interests in the future. However, in Africa's electoral regimes the workings of these formal institutions are influenced by political party informal institution that shape electoral contest. In country where electoral institutions are well established, prospects of electoral defeat should not be sufficient to motivate politicians to engage in violent electoral tactics (Colomer, 2007).

Nigeria has had very poor antecedents in conducting free and fair elections, elections having consistently been mired by poor organization by the Electoral Management Body leading to questionable voters' registration, the disenfranchisement of credible voters, intimidation, bribery, violence and outright manipulation of results. Decades of these bad experiences have made most Nigerians lose faith in the electoral process (Olutola, 2007). INEC's organizational technical and structural shortcomings opened up new doors for fraudulent activities conducted by the parties and their candidates. Commenting on the 2015 that see the Peoples Democratic Party defeated in the

presidential election, it observed that INEC was certainly and genuinely not in absolute control of activities on election day. And independent election observer also pointed out that INEC could not vouch for the integrity of the election officials who were engaged all over the country.

VII. 2011-2015 ELECTION PROCESS

Nigeria's 20 general election received high praise for being well-managed. But postelection violence claimed 800 lives over three days in northern Nigeria and displaced 65,000 people, making the elections the most violent in Nigeria's history (Human Rights Watch, 2011). When Jonathan's victory was announced in 2011, there was rioting in the north, accompanied by the greatest bloodshed since the 1967-70 civil war. The rioting initially appeared directed against those in the Islamic establishment who had supported the Jonathan candidacy, and later degenerated into ethnic and religious killings. Under these circumstances, some are expressing nostalgia for the 2007 elections, in which sitting president Goodluck Jonathan was elected, defeating Muhammadu Buhari. Jonathan initially became president in 2010 upon the death of President Umaru Yar'Adua.) At the time, international observers proclaimed the elections as a dramatic improvement over those of 2007 (Orji, 2014). 2015 electoral outcome in light of previous electoral rounds and emphasize how the former built on the latter. In 2015, Nigerians prepared for the fifth round of national elections. More than ever, the presidential vote was a two-horse race from the outset, with the newly created All Progressives Congress APC and Muhammadu Buhari, a Fulani and a former military dictator who solidly won the primaries, posing a powerful challenge to PDP rule (Onapajo, 2014). The 2015 elections can therefore be viewed as a positive step towards democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The elections enabled the country to achieve inter-party alternation of the presidency for the first time in its electoral history. Although many issues were raised concerning the operation of the electoral body in the post-election period. The severe operational and logistical problems encountered by the INEC before and during the elections indicate a critical need to scale up the commission's professional capacity through sustained reforms (Anwar, 2016).

VIII. THEORETICAL FRAME WORK

Several theories of democracy have been put forward by scholars and social scientists to explain the concepts of elections and democratic consolidation. The nexus between elections or electoral process and democratic consolidation is a complex, thus creating problem of analysis of specific democratization situations. The theories are advanced to examine the ways in which electoral processes shape democratic consolidation.

IX. LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC THEORY

This study is situated within liberal democratic theory as the most suitable framework that offers useful premise upon which further arguments can be built on elections and democratic consolidation. The theory can be traced to the writings and works of the scholars, including Francis Fukuyama (1992); John Locke (1963); John Stuart Mills (1948); Fareed Zakaria (1997), CB Macpherson (1977) among others. Historically, liberal democracy can be traced to two important eras. The first era, the Enlightenment era in 18th century, when there was struggle between the people and church regarding the principle of equality and liberty guiding human interactions and not religious norms. The second period, during the 19th century, the context of liberal democracy was expanded to include the market ideology and the liberalization of trade. Numerous studies have stressed the importance and justification of liberal democracy as a mechanism for equal opportunities and as the most preferred political system (Claus, 2011; Leon, 2010; Pace, 2009; Omotola, 2009; Chan, 2002, Plattner, 1998). According to Plattner (1998:173), liberal democracy relates not to the issue of who rules but rather to the manner of how that rule is exercised. Succinctly, it presupposes that government is restricted in the exercise of its power by the rule of law and/or by the constitution, but ultimately the liberties and rights of individuals restrict it. These rights and liberties are known as "fundamental human rights" and are traceable to liberalism. Their guarantee is significant elements of liberal democratic ideology (Plattner, 1998). Liberty, therefore, is a significant element of democracy. Put differently, liberal democracy is a way to describe countries with free and fair elections, rule of law and protected civil liberties.

The fundamental idea of liberal democratic theory, therefore, is conceived in its motivation for a political system, which safeguards individual freedoms, and a system of restraint, which subjects elected office holders to public accountability through the respect for the rule of law and constitutionalism. Liberal democratic theory is important to the democratizing state, as it underscores many core values and principles (such as the protection and promotion of basic human rights, accountability, and government limited by the rule of law). These principles are essential in attaining a stable and consolidated democratic system, since they ensure the protection of liberties and rights and restrain exercise of government power. Promoting the consolidation of democracy in many newly democratizing states, therefore, requires the compliance with these principles to guarantee and safeguard democracy from reversal and authoritarianism.

In liberal democratic theory, the establishment of free, fair and meaningful competitive elections is an important element in the consolidation of democracy, and it shows the exercise of civil and political liberties by the electorate. While the institutionalization of freedom through electoral competition is increasingly recognized as a key element of democracy (Rose and Shin, 2001). The insufficiency of this condition motivated Linz and Stepan (1996) to contend that 'consolidation does not necessarily entail a high-quality

democracy or a high-quality society'. Held (1996) argued that voting through elections is by itself an inadequate form of participation, particularly in countries where voting has little or no meaning in the institutionalization of democracy. Although the sentiment that elections are central to liberal democracy has been illuminated in the literature of democratization, notwithstanding, they are inadequate in 'effectively ensuring citizen control over political life, as authoritarian legacies and elite dominated political parties limit informed electoral choices (Younger, 1991). This was why Zakaria (1997) noted that elections as a procedural requirement are not the only virtuous elements of liberal democracy, hence there is a need to broaden the focus to constitutional liberalism. The point, therefore, is that liberal democracy makes sense only when their substantive and procedural aspects complement one another. Therefore, showing commitment to modern liberal democracy or a democratic 'Rechtsstaat' is to combine the two traditions of 'electoral and liberal.

The existence of liberal principles in a democracy, such as the rule of law, individual freedoms, institutions for check and balancing, accountability is therefore, the intrinsic values that make elections meaningful to enhance the prospects of democratic consolidation. Thus, a consolidated liberal democracy requires more than simply periodic elections but also the independent of the electoral umpire and institutions from monopolization of the political parties.

X. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research design of the study is the first aspect that is discussed, which is backed by a discussion on how samples were selected finally yielding a brief review on the sampling technique used. The chapter further discusses the method of data collection, the population, instruments that aided the process of data accumulation and ends by giving and inspection method of data analyses. This study therefore employed a phenomenological research design which has the formed pattern of a qualitative research strategy. In essence phenomenology is the qualitative tradition of inquiry used for this study informed by social constructivist perspectives, which hold that knowledge is socially constructed through social interaction (Gergen, 1985). Phenomenology occupies an important position in modern thinking (Dowling, 2007). There is an endeavor to understand the fundamental nature of people's experiences

and interpretations of key events of their lives (Spiegelberg, 1982; Bryman, 2008), and the approach has been described as a way to break free and see the world afresh (Crotty, 1998). In this section of this research work I intend to provide an overview of phenomenology design, its main tenets and acknowledge how they inform this study. Using phenomenology as a method of inquiry to investigate electoral institutions and democracy consolidation is an alien effort. Although this approach has been used by several researchers around the world; however, there is a dearth of it in the area of democratization process. The population of this study comprises of three categories of participants. The first category consisted of electoral official (INEC) working at the office of the commission and in this category will also include NYSC member that are likely to have taken part in conducting election before during their deployment and Academia. The participants were selected based on their varied experience during elections. The Second category are members of political party that have experience voting arrangement or participate in organize election in the state or constituency. This individual will be NYSC corps member and electoral officials. Those population are considered knowledgeable on issues which the researcher will be investigating.

The researcher used semi-structured interview schedule, comprising of closed-ended and open-ended questions. Questions were directed to the participant's experiences, beliefs and convictions about the theme in question. This type of interview is reciprocal both researcher and research subject are engaged in the dialogue. It was flexible and allowed both open-ended and close-ended discussion with the participants. The interview schedule helped the researcher to discover the impact of electoral institutions in consolidating democracy. In addition, audio tape recorder on its path was used to record data so that content validity could be established without the major risks of bias. In other words, the tape was used to record the narrated stories as told by the participants in order to avoid the influence of the data by either omitting or adding some parts by the researcher. Finally, secondary data was sought to inform the study. This included data collection from journals, books, internet sources, and dissertations. Histories and profiles of communities, and NGOs were being used as they offered systematic accounts of conflict early warning and conflict prevention.

| Profession | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------|-----------|------------|
| INEC OFFICIAL | 7 | 2.1 |
| Academia | 4 | 1.2 |
| NYSC | 4 | 1.2 |
| Male | 7 | 2.1 |
| Female | 8 | 2.4 |
| Total | 30 | 100 |

Table 1: Demographic Description

The objective of this study was to examine the role of electoral institutions in consolidating and deepening democracy in Nigeria. The discussion of the research findings provided above is based on the understanding and

explanations of circumstances and experiences of various participants; drawn upon subjective reality as the participants have the relevant experience required to shed

light on. In the view of this, it is worth discussing the findings of the study with each research question discussed.

The study once again affirms the notion that electoral bodies without autonomy will render electoral process impossible and democracy consolidation unrealistic. The research also established the factors that prevent or facilitate the effectiveness of electoral institutions in electoral process. The study found that there was widespread of election rigging, violence and votes buying, especially during 2003 and 2007/2011 general elections. The participants that were interviewed mentioned that remarkable change began in the Nigerian electoral institutions right from 2015 elections. The Electoral body, INEC, under the leadership of Prof Attahiru Jega introduced mechanisms for discouraging election rigging; namely, voters' registration, permanent voters' card and card reader. This development has revived the hope and trust of the electorates as they have witnessed several removals of sitting political leaders from office. Although there still remain elements of election fraud in Nigerian electoral process as reported during the 2015 general election, it is widely accepted that Nigerian democracy is moving gradually but not static. With each research question discussed separately, and thereby concluding this chapter of the study. However, this success is associated with an increase in the level of independent Nigeria Electoral bodies as they work to discharge their duties.

In seeking to examine challenges facing electoral institutions in consolidating democracy in Nigeria, some themes were analyzed. The results revealed that lack of autonomy for Electoral institutions is a major challenge facing electoral bodies in Nigeria. Other challenges include delayed electoral justice, communication and logistic problems as well as inability to bring offenders to justice. Without independence of electoral institutions, as the participants mentioned. "It will be difficult to achieve free and fair elections". There is need for improved, reliable and trusted electoral bodies in the electoral process in Nigeria. The culture of delayed electoral justice should be discouraged, and offenders of electoral offences should be brought to account.

XI. RECOMMENDATION

The effort to consolidate democracy continues to be severely constrained by factors such as election rigging and violence, lack of respect for rule of law, and lack of autonomy for electoral bodies. There is therefore need of the law enforcement in the country and the judiciary to cooperate with the INEC during voters' registration, party congresses and conventions, political campaigns/meetings and rallies, voting and postelection in other to create an enabling environment for electorate and the electoral to function and deliver a free and fair election in the country.

This study also recommends special training, orientation programmes prior elections should be conducted to sensitize the various security agencies to understand and carry out their roles during and after in elections. Security Officers redeployed specifically for electoral responsibilities

should be remunerated. This remuneration should be in the form of electoral allowance for the security officers paid differently from their normal salaries. This reward should be handsome enough to enable them to stand their ground against being bribed by the desperate politicians. The role of the security agencies in electoral process is very crucial. However, there is no provision of such in the Nigeria Electoral Act of 2006 as amended in 2010. Although the 1999 Constitution and Nigeria Police Act elaborate the general functions of the Police, there is need for specific details of the role of the Nigeria police and other security agencies in relations to election. Therefore, the functions of the various security agencies during elections should be specified in the Nigeria Electoral Act. While local and international monitoring groups have been very keen at reporting cases of electoral conducts in Nigeria, often, the activities of the security agencies are not covered.

A legislation that will enable them to monitor the activities of the various security agencies during elections should be enacted. Civic vigilance is necessary in election. In the event that the police engage in compromising roles, people around should alert the media who investigates any such story and disseminates it: tender such as election tribunals if relevant as evidence. Police authorities should instantly punish their personnel involved in such acts. To mitigate violence in elections, there is need for adequate security planning between the election management body (INEC), police and other security agencies involved in the elections. Civil society organizations and the National Orientation Agency should embark on early civic education while political parties should educate their supporters on proper conducts all through the electioneering period.

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