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## The Electoral Process and Crisis of Legitimacy in Nigeria

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**Abstract:** *The major reason for selecting leaders through elections according to rules and regulations is to guarantee political and social stability. This submission, however, appears to have lost its value as elections in Nigeria have always ended in bitter struggles, rigging and violence. Elections, rather than reflecting the will of the people with regard to who represents them, are only conducted as merely a regular ritual by the political class to renew the allotted power of its members. Nigeria is fast derailing into one of the pseudo democracies that pervade developing countries, with little or no regard for the will of the electorate. The country's democracy has grossly been bedeviled with flawed elections at all levels of government, having more of imposed leaders than elected. Elections are conducted as a means of alternating power among the competing political gladiators, mostly in a violent manner that reflects desperation and as such erodes the legitimizing effects of election on democracy. This essay explores some of the variables that continually seek to undermine the power of the electorate and why they seem to be helpless. It also attempts to assess the four consecutive elections that took place between 1999 (when the country emerged from uninterrupted sixteen years of military authoritarianism), and 2011 (the last date involving elections nationwide). More importantly, the overlapping interface between electoral process and legitimacy crisis is examined while some of the daunting challenges facing Nigeria's electoral process are highlighted. The general elections conducted so far, that is 1998/99, 2003, 2007 and 2011 elections, are examined below, being the scope of this essay.*

**Keywords:** *Election, Democracy, Legitimacy, Governance, Electorate*

### 1. Introduction

In Africa, many countries moved away from one party state towards multi-party system in the late nineteen eighties, but this has not always resulted in the establishment of true democracy. While the democratic structures and institutions have been put in place, many systems continue to work according to old social arrangements and rules centered on exclusion and control that favour the interests of a narrow elite. As a result, electoral democracies are not democracies of citizens. In Nigeria for example "the absence of credible and vibrant democratic systems is seen by most Nigerians and external observers as a major cause of the development challenges that characterise Nigeria: misallocation, mismanagement and misappropriation of public resources; the prevalence of patron-client relations; and poor public service delivery and citizen alienation from government" (DGD, 2010:6). Elections are at the very core of democracy. Even if democracy is conceived as involving much more than elections, and even if an ideal democracy includes important forms of direct participation by citizens in many aspects of public decisions, still the most basic constraint on oppressive state authority that we have is the fact that we elect the decision makers and can get rid of them if we dislike what they do. As affirmed by Gambo (2006:88) any political leadership which emerges from a free and fair electoral process enjoys consistent support of the citizenry and is scarcely questioned in terms of legitimacy. Indeed, such a political leadership, depending on how it exercises the popular mandate given to it to govern, may experience rising or declining legitimacy rating profile.

Election is not merely a condition for democracy, it is a necessary process. As a result of this, a system of government cannot be regarded as democratic if it does not result from the choices of parties, politicians and policies made by citizens through free and fair electoral rules, processes and administration (Alemika, 2006: 138). The question of choice is, therefore, central to democracy. Elections provide an avenue for choosing between different political parties and candidates offering different programmes. Elections give them the power of deciding how they are ruled and who rules them (Obi, 2008:20). It should be noted that while regular multi-party elections do not necessarily guarantee the establishment of a democratic state, no state can be said to be democratic if it does not hold regular elections, according to a set of rules that are fair to the political parties and the electorate involved.

The inauguration of a civilian government on 29 May 1999 marked the end of almost 16 years of military rule in Nigeria. Many do not regard the event as a return to democratic governance for several reasons, the most important being that all the processes which culminated in the event were master-minded by the authoritarian military oligarchy, whose political agenda was fashioned and executed without a valid constitutional framework (IDEA, 2001:26). This essay, therefore, explores some of the variables that continually seek to undermine the power of the electorate and why they seem to be helpless. It also attempts to assess the four

consecutive elections that took place between 1999 (when the country emerged from uninterrupted sixteen years of military authoritarianism), and 2011 (the last date involving elections nationwide). More importantly, the overlapping interface between electoral process and legitimacy crisis is examined while some of the daunting challenges facing Nigeria's electoral process are highlighted. The general elections conducted so far, that is 1998/99, 2003, 2007 and 2011 elections, are examined below, being the scope of this essay.

## 2. The 1999 General Elections

The 1999 general elections heralded the country into the *Fourth Republic* after sixteen years of military authoritarianism and series of unsuccessful transition programmes embarked upon by different regimes. These programmes were, more often, organized to buy time and stabilise their government or as a mechanism for getting public acceptability. Again, the 1999 elections provided another litmus test for Nigeria to really demonstrate to the whole world, its capability and readiness to launch a democratic government on the eve of the twenty-first century.

While assessing the elections so far conducted in Nigeria in recent years, the Human Rights Watch (2007:1) submits that: "the transition to civilian rule has not delivered democratically accountable government for Nigerians. Nigeria has not held a free and fair general election since the end of military rule; polls in 1999 and 2003 were characterized by widespread violence, intimidation, bribery, vote rigging and corruption. The officials who came to office through that process have generally not realized the hopes of Nigerians for socioeconomic advancement and better governance". The process for conducting the 1999 elections and the general outcome were more acceptable and relatively less outrageous. Although there were remarkable sharp practices and irregularities, the All People's Party, APP candidate, Mohammed Buhari, could not mobilize substantial evidence to reverse the declared result. At the end of the voting, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) won the presidential election with Chief Olusegun Obasanjo emerging as the President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. The party equally won 21 gubernatorial seats, while the closest rival, the All People's Party (APP) came second with 9 gubernatorial positions. The Alliance for Democracy won 6 gubernatorial positions (Okolie, 2005:439). The interim report of the Transition Monitoring Group (2007:1-4), after the first round of the elections clearly identifies some irregularities:

Although the elections were held in a generally peaceful atmosphere, the security situation across the country indicated that a lot still remains to be done in this area. It should be noted that elections did not hold in some parts of the country, in particular, Bayelsa State, where no elections were held at all..... In some cases, it was observed that the voters' registers were either incomplete in that whole pages were missing, or appeared to have been altered in that some registered voters with registration cards found either that their names were missing, or that the names on the cards did not correspond with those against the relevant number in the register.

The 1999 elections which brought Nigeria back to the comity of democratic nations cannot be said to be anything free and fair. Having been conducted by a military government, there were no strong institutional and legal mechanisms to guarantee free and fair polls. The results of the election were largely accepted because Nigerians and the international community craved a change of governance in Nigeria. In other words, the electoral climate and the ensuing results were merely tolerated due to the desired change the transition was envisaged to bring (Action Aid Nigeria, 2007:2). If the 1999 elections were seen, as stated earlier, as a litmus test for Nigeria's political development, many had anticipated some appreciable degree of improvement in subsequent elections over what they witnessed in 1999. It should be noted too that the democratic experiment has, since inception, been described as a learning process where perfection could not be attained at a starting point but a process that gives room for advancement in all its ramifications.

## 3. The 2003 And 2007 General Elections- Emerging Issues

With the inadequacies inherent in the renewed attempt at democratic rule in Nigeria, the 2003 elections were intended to set the Fourth Republic on the path of legitimacy and responsive government. Unfortunately, the 2003 general elections took place in a general context of popular alienation and political uncertainty. The wider background was one of non-inclusive political and electoral systems and legacies of military rule, which the civilian government found convenient to retain rather than reform (TMG 2003:6). The Transition Monitoring Group further notes that the overall credibility of the elections was in doubt and that the elections fell short of minimum national and international standards. In fact, it stated categorically that "none of the major political parties can claim a moral high ground in making allegations on rigging" because the whole exercise recorded several cases of under-age voting, ballot stuffing and snatching, inflation of votes and generalized thuggery.

A review of the 2003 election by the DFID, cited in Egwu, (2005:20) also highlights several flaws. The flaws and weaknesses in election management and administration occurred at crucial stages. These include the inadequate registration of voters, delay in the electoral timetable as a result of uncertainties surrounding nomination and the late publication of lists of candidates by political parties. Other shortcomings were delay in the release of election manuals, recruitment and training of election officials, poor distribution of election materials and the questionable situation surrounding the counting and transmission of results. Further important flaws captured in the report are late civic education activities undertaken by civil society organizations, problems of coordination among election observers, the abdication of their primary responsibilities by political parties, and the inability to deal with tensions and violence that arose in the course of the elections.

The April 2007 elections were to transfer power from one administration to another with a different personality taking over the power of presidency. The build-up to the election in different parts of the country by politicians of all shades and character, clearly gave an ominous sign of what the outcome of the elections would be. The fear of having fraudulent elections was entertained in many quarters. The Center for Democracy and Development, CDD (2006:1), in its advocacy document, posited that "just as observers concur that the 2003 polls were in many places marred by fraud and violence, the 2007 polls also contain huge potential

to go off-track: to become not a milestone in democratic consolidation, but instead one marred by malpractice, injustice, criminality, violence, human rights abuses and increased instability”.

The conduct and outcome of the elections eventually justified these fears as both international and domestic observers submitted that the April 14, and 21 elections were seriously flawed. Former U.S Secretary of State, Madeline Albright, who led the election monitoring group from the National Democratic Institute, declared that the electoral process had ‘failed the Nigerian people’ (PAAM’ 2007:i). A Dutch member of the European Parliament, Max Van den Berg, who led the European Union’s election observers, was even more scathing in his comment: The 2007 state and federal elections have fallen short of basic international and regional standards for democratic elections, and the process cannot be considered to be credible.

Felix Alaba Job, head of the Catholic Bishops Conference, cited massive fraud and disorganization, including result sheets being passed around to politicians who simply filled in numbers as they chose while bribed Returning Electoral Officers looked away. A clinician ecumenist, Moi Thompson (Wikipedia, 2007:2) compared Nigeria’s elections to those of Liberia in 2005, saying, “Even Liberia, which is coming out of war had more credible elections than Nigeria. Nigeria has once again failed to rise to the occasion.... Size isn’t enough .... it is a failed giant”. Lack of confidence in the electoral process and particularly in the outcome of the 2007 elections among the Nigerian electorate has been documented by different organizations.

In realization of the legitimacy problem that his government was faced with, the late President Yar’Adua took some steps to suggest the urgent need of the new administration for moral authority arising from public acceptability and institutional reform. One of such was the composition of a twenty-two man committee saddled with the reform of the country’s electoral system. The integrity of those on the committee was acknowledged even by the critics of the government, though doubting the sincere implementation of their recommendations by the government. The immediate proposed Government of National Unity by the President to involve opposition parties and technocrats after his inauguration was also a pointer to the fact that the electoral process may have edged out some candidates or parties with potential of winning some of the elections.

#### **4. The 2011 General Elections: A Synopsis of the Observable Variations and Similarities**

Nigeria’s April 2011 elections were viewed by many as a critical test of the government’s commitment to democracy. Most findings of election observer groups characterized the 2011 elections as a significant improvement over previous polls, although not without problems. Post-election violence across the north highlighted lingering communal tensions, grievances, and mistrust. President Goodluck Jonathan, who was elected, faces mounting, and, at times, competing, internal and external pressure to implement reforms deemed critical to addressing corruption and other development and security challenges (Lauren Ploch, 2011:5). INEC’s credibility had been badly damaged by the 2003 and 2007 elections, and President Jonathan won praise from both Nigerians and the international community for removing the sitting INEC chairman from office in April 2010 and replacing him with a respected academic and civil society activist, Professor Attahiru Jega. Concerns remain regarding the independence of some state-level electoral election commissioners, (ICG, cited in Lauren Ploch, 2011:5) but, according to a survey conducted in late 2010, over 60% of Nigerians had confidence in the current electoral commission, and 74% of Nigerians thought the 2011 polls would be more credible than the last (IRI, cited in *ibid*). This is further attested to by the Global Commission on Elections, Democracy and Security, (2012:25):

Important progress was made in the 2011 elections towards professionalizing the country’s Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), most importantly through the appointment of a respected academic as chairman. Professor Attahiru M. Jega, who became known as ‘Mr Integrity’, revamped the voter registration process, improved transparency at the Commission and for the first time prosecuted government officials (including INEC officials) for electoral malpractice.

With over 73 million registered voters, almost 120,000 polling stations, and more than 50 political parties, the challenges in administering elections in Nigeria were daunting. The 2011 elections were scheduled to be held on three successive Saturdays, beginning April 2; however, logistical delays in the delivery of materials to polling stations across the country resulted in the delay of the April 2 legislative elections by a week, to April 9. This pushed the timing of the presidential elections to April 16 and the gubernatorial and state assembly elections to April 26. For some, the delay reinforced concerns regarding the credibility of the polls, but others argued that the “trial run” allowed INEC the opportunity to identify and address some deficiencies, particularly related to the voters’ register. (Lauren Ploch, *op cit*).

International observers also generally noted significant improvements in the electoral process in the National Assembly and presidential polls, but most stopped short of calling the elections “free and fair.” Observed irregularities, as reported by international observer groups, do not appear to call into question the overall results of the legislative and presidential polls (most international groups were not present for the state elections), although several legal challenges were filed. The IRI and National Democratic Institute, NDI, delegations both termed these elections a key step forward, while documenting areas for improvement. The African Union delegation called the legislative and presidential elections “credible and creditable and reflect(ing) the will of the Nigerian people” (*ibid*). The European Union (EU) delegation was also generally positive, but raised concerns with presidential results from some states in the Niger Delta and the southeast, where turnout appeared to be near 100%.

The 2011 elections in Nigeria, according to Madu (2011:16) “have given the country a new face. Nigerians can raise their heads up and feel proud that their voices have been heard and that their choices matter in elections. While the election was not perfect, as there are no perfect elections, the outcome shows for the first time that the people are partaking in decision making as their choices are respected. Several incumbents lost at all levels showing that the era of rigging oneself into power by using government machinery is becoming mundane and unacceptable to the greater population. The election was not without its shortcomings”. While assessing the pre-elections activities in its editorial, *The Punch* (2011:18) observes that:

The incredibly short time within which registration and elections had to be conducted made the exercise one of the most expensive, gulping about N 93.4 billion. The registration exercise was threatened by either late arrival or non-availability of

personnel and materials in many centres. Despite the approval of a staggering amount for the voter registration, contracts for machines and other materials needed for the exercise were awarded late, which was why most of them were not supplied before the registration started.

The Newspaper, however, suggests that INEC should come out with a four-year strategic plan that would resolve the embarrassing hiccups observed in the April 2011 polls. The electoral system should be upgraded to meet future challenges. Nigeria ought to take a cue from nations where electoral systems are better organized. In many democracies, voters are automatically added to the rolls when they reach voting age. In other words, such potential voters are expected to apply to be added to the rolls.

Like previous elections, the polls were riddled with malpractices, logistical deficiencies and procedural inconsistencies. Reported voter turnout of about 78 per cent in the South-South and the South-East during the presidential elections exceeded the national average by at least 50 per cent, suggesting electoral fraud. Yet, the polls were, on balance, the most credible to date. Across the country, the strength of the electoral process appeared mostly to have trumped its weaknesses (ICG, 2011). The legal framework for the 2011 general elections, according to the European Union (2011:24) provides an adequate basis for the conduct of democratic elections in accordance with international principles and with the international instruments ratified by the Federal Republic of Nigeria. It, however, notes that a number of key issues remain to be addressed as shortcomings, lacunae and ambiguities exist, while an exercise of political will by all stakeholders is required to ensure proper implementation.

The 2011 elections were also characterised by voter apathy. A research project (on 2011 Voter Apathy) commissioned by the country's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the Nigeria office of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) where 1,200 Nigerians of voting age were randomly selected and interviewed across the six geopolitical zones revealed that "more Nigerians of voting age captured by the survey indicated plans to vote during Presidential and Gubernatorial elections than in the National Assembly (NASS) election. The intention to vote during the gubernatorial election was as expected; Governors are closer to voters than the President. However, preference to vote more during the Presidential election compared to National Assembly election can be explained by historical tendency of the Nigerian electorate to consider elections into executive positions in the federation to be more crucial than elections into legislative seats, among other factors". Respondents identified politicians as being most responsible for voter apathy, with the politicians, government and INEC ranking highest on their list of those considered responsible for voter apathy (INEC and FES, 2011).

## **5. Challenges of Electioneering in Nigeria**

Like many of the failed or failing states, Nigeria does not provide a just and veritable platform for its teeming masses to change abysmally bad governance. Elections have not always been free and fair, thus making the concept of popular participation an illusion (Omilusi, 2007: 34). It, therefore, becomes imperative to discuss in this essay, some of the challenges militating against free, fair and credible election in the country. Five major challenges that must be overcome in order to conduct elections with integrity have been identified in the report of the Global Commission on Elections, Democracy and Security (2012:6): 1. building the rule of law to substantiate claims to human rights and electoral justice; 2. building professional, competent electoral management bodies (EMBs) with full independence of action to administer elections that are transparent and merit public confidence; 3. creating institutions and norms of multiparty competition and division of power that bolster democracy as a mutual security system among political contenders; 4. removing barriers-legal, administrative, political, economic, and social-to universal and equal political participation; and 5. regulating uncontrolled, undisclosed, and opaque political finance. For the purpose of this discussion, I will focus on the following challenges:

### *5.1. The Partisanship of the Electoral Body*

The roles of election management bodies (EMBs) are vital during the electoral cycle (EISA, 2010:4). Perhaps the most important institution in Nigeria's present democratization in terms of electoral administration is the INEC. This is mainly because of its sensitive assignment, which includes the registration of political parties and the monitoring of their financial activities but more importantly the conduct of elections for various political offices. These include the supervision of party primaries and the actual conduct of general elections. The INEC's performance in all of these functions since 1999 has been abysmal (Yagboaju, 2011:98).

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) which was established by Decree 17 of 1998 is to manage all electoral processes as they concern federal elections. Although the integrity of elections is fundamentally germane to the sustenance of a truly representative form of government, election conduct in Nigeria has been persistently incredible and unsatisfactory, as the umpires have consistently performed below expectation. Experience indeed patently reveals that the successive electoral commissions in the country have either been pro-ruling party or engaged in the manipulation of election results in favour of the highest bidding contestants (Akinboye, 2005: 294).

Until the appointment of Attahiru Jega as the chairman, the electoral body, since 1999, was under the firm grip of the ruling party, working against opposition parties and the general electoral interest of the citizenry. Also, the issue of funding has been an impediment to the independence of the Electoral Body. The ruling party had always capitalized on this to manipulate the leadership of the Commission until recently when the constitutional amendments (made in preparation for the 2011 elections), partially resolved the issues considered by the Electoral Reform Committee. Changes were made to the way INEC is funded; an amendment was made to the Nigerian Constitution to allow INEC to be funded from the Consolidated Fund. This put INEC on a par with the Judiciary and the National Assembly in terms of funding procedure.

### 5.2. *Undemocratic Political Parties*

In any democracy, political parties form a critical pillar for the entrenchment of democratic culture and practice. This means, among other things, that for parties to add value to democratisation at the national level they ought to embrace not only tolerance and internal democracy but, most importantly, be able to manage both their internal and external conflicts in a democratic manner. For instance, all party structures must be democratically elected in order for the political party to entrench the culture of democracy in the country. Each party must live and practise democracy internally in order to be seen to be democratic (Likoti, 2007:17).

Nigeria has a history of multi-party system dating to the 1920s, but despite their importance as institutions in the democratic process, political parties have remained weak and fragile. Essentially, political parties have exhibited a limited understanding of their larger role in a democracy and political elites have retained interest in parties as a procedural element of electoral democracy. The limitations of the political parties as institutional foundations of democracy and the irresponsibility of political actors, have significantly weakened electoral democracy in Nigeria's 4<sup>th</sup> Republic. Principal weaknesses of the party system include: the absence of internal democracy; exclusion and marginalization of women; weak financial accountability; lack of effective representation; and resort to violence as means of resolving conflicts (DGD, 2010:23).

There is no gainsaying the fact that political parties in Nigeria generally lack ideological base and demonstrate a disregard for democratic norms entirely. The way and manner they choose their candidates for elections leaves much to be desired. In most cases, only those with financial wherewithal to bribe party leaders always emerge. The truth of the matter is that a political party without internal democracy cannot produce a democratic government for the country. Most political parties are usually hijacked by moneybags who in turn finance and control their activities on almost all strategic decisions. This observation has also been noted by Inokoba and Kumokor, (2011:144): The inability of the Nigerian state to organise democratic elections is less surprising when we consider the fact that political parties in the country are devoid of internal democracy. Party flag bearers are selected at the whims of the god-fathers and imposed on the electorate not on the basis of competence, but on loyalty to the god-father to whom the successful political office holder account for stewardship in cash. Little wonder, it is posited by Animashaun (2010:15) that many of the political parties under the current democratic dispensation in Nigeria have only limited possibilities of survival much less of electoral success. As evident in the 2007 general elections, out of the 50 recognized parties in the country, only 8 made electoral impact in the elections.

### 5.3. *Electoral Fraud/ Violence and Attraction of Political Offices*

Since electoral processes are fundamentally about the attainment of political power, often in high-stakes contexts, they can be a catalyst for conflict. It is within these contexts that social tensions are elevated, often provoking violence. This is particularly true when the electoral process itself is not perceived to be free and fair, or when those seeking to retain or gain political power have no reservations about resorting to the use of violence (EISA, 2010:6). Elections have continually recorded representation deficit since 1999. Under the present dispensation, the incidence of electoral fraud has taken centre stage in the country. This has led to a major legitimacy crisis which the country is still grappling with (Omodia, 2009). Also, violence has remained a recurring feature of electoral politics in Nigeria. The tendency to rely on violence as a weapon of electoral competition is aggravated, among others, by two factors. First is the perception of state power by the governing elite as an end in itself rather than a means to an end. The second is the immensity and ubiquity of state power and its exclusive control of the forces of coercion. These two factors have combined to make state power rabidly attractive and thus political contest is reduced to warfare (Animashaun, 2010:13).

Rigging has been conventionally accepted as part of the system in a country where a party that has more of the manipulative strength out-rigs others. Awopeju (2011:2) observes that the outcomes of many elections have been so fiercely contested that the survival of the country and democracy has been jeopardized. This sad history of election fraud has serious implications for Nigeria's political future because the phenomenon rather than declining, keeps growing and becoming more sophisticated with every succeeding election. The principal forms of election fraud or irregularities were perfected in the elections of 1964, 1965, 1979, 1983, 1999, 2003 and 2007. Ladan (2006:53) sums up the various compositions of rigging thus:

Election rigging is a criminal conduct of subverting an entire process through massive, organized fraud usually with the active participation of officials of the electoral body. Experience has shown that rigging can take many forms. It could be stuffing of the ballot box with fake ballot papers... falsification of results and forgery of figures... voting by unregistered person and publication of false statement of the withdrawal of a candidate... artificial scarcity of ballot papers... diversion or snatching of ballot boxes between polling booths and counting centers and abduction of returning officers.

These are the usual features of an election in Nigeria such that every right thinking person begins to wonder if any election had ever taken place after the exercise. And these always lead to violence. Electoral violence has been variously described as the bane of democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The zero-sum game with which electoral process in the country is characterized has assumed a very dangerous dimension with all political gladiators preparing for an election just the same way soldiers would have prepared for a war- recruitment, training of armed political thugs, stock-piling of ammunition, provision of fake security agents' uniforms, among others. The toll of electoral violence- in terms of number of lives lost, property destroyed and injuries sustained- continues to undermine the survival of the country's democratic experiment.

The armed militia, neighbourhood vigilante, community defence and sundry cult groups that have mushroomed in different parts of the country since the late 1990s also play a significant role in electoral violence. With the approach of every election, some are hired by local politicians, while others undertake independent acts of violence to demonstrate their capacities and thus capture the attention of any politicians who may need their services. In an atmosphere of almost total impunity, a thriving market for political violence has developed. The rules of supply and demand for political assassinations, kidnappings and other strategies of

intimidation are freely applied throughout the country; those willing to enter this competitive market have to prove their competency and added value by using distinctive tactics and technology (International Crisis Group, 2007:11).

What actually worsens this “do or die” phenomenon is the money-making venture status that political office in Nigeria has assumed. Apart from the holders of political office viewing the opportunity from the lens of an unflinching attempt to permanently eradicate family poverty- by corruptly enriching themselves- government has since 1999 astronomically reviewed upward, their salaries and entitlements. Local government chairmen and councillors, for instance, are like small gods in their communities considering the volume of money at their disposal, more so that they are practically accountable to no one.

#### 5.4. *Godfatherism*

Elections provide a theatre of power politics amongst elites in Africa. Such moments lay bare elites’ desperation to hang on to power for incumbents, or achieve power for marginal elites. For incumbents, state resources and other privileges associated with state power are invested in retaining power. And for those wanting to gain power, personal wealth and those of “power brokers” are patronised to fight their way into power (Tar and Shettima, 2010:139). This is the political scenario that is frequently witnessed in Nigeria. Spinoza and Vallée (2008:6) contend that political contests have little to do with ideas as such, but are mainly a merciless struggle over financial interests, mainly oil-related. The contending clans have a whole arsenal of weapons available, from the misuse of institutions and the purchase of community, social or economic loyalties as far as legal guerrilla warfare and even political assassination

There is an observable deviation from the conventional pattern of electoral politics in Nigeria’s fourth republic which was inaugurated on May 29, 1999. Individuals, rather than political parties, are the driving force of electoral politics in the current dispensation. Some individuals with questionable sources of money and other influences have eclipsed parties in the determination of choice of candidates for election into public offices. These individuals of questionable means and character have robbed political parties of their conventional and legitimate functions. Godfatherism, in this sense, means the practice of political office seekers getting connected to an individual who is believed to have the ability to deliver desired outcome in an electoral contest (Gambo, 2006 : 88-90). In other words, “the godfather-patron deploys his knowledge and control of structure of voting public to capture the party machinery for himself. With his control of the party structure he becomes the sponsor of politicians and no longer their broker. He uses his control of party machinery to impose his clients as party candidates for elective office and ensures their electoral success through activities which have been characterized as electoral corruption’ (Olarinmoye, 2008:70). Referred to as political entrepreneurship, Agbaje and Adejumbi (2006:40) regard this phenomenon as a product of monetized politics in Nigeria:

The immediate consequence of a monetised electoral politics is the emergence of ‘political barons’ - political entrepreneurs, who invest in election candidates for higher financial and political returns. Political barons hold neither elective political offices nor party positions. They often constitute informal leaders, who are more powerful than the party chiefs and formal office holders. They sponsor candidates, control the internal party nomination process, finance electoral campaigns, rig elections on behalf of their candidates, corrupt election officials, and sometimes change the names of candidates after elections have been concluded.

These godfathers are not mere financiers of political campaigns. Rather, they are individuals, whose power stems not just from wealth but from their ability to deploy every means and resource whatsoever, including violence and corruption to manipulate national, state or local political systems in support of the politicians they sponsor. In return, they demand a substantial degree of control over the governments they help bring into being- not in order to shape government policies, but to exact direct financial “returns” in the form of government resources stolen by their protégés or lucrative government contracts awarded to them as further opportunities for graft. Godfathers also require their sponsored politicians to use government institutions to generate patronage for other protégés (HRW, op cit: 33).

#### 5.5. *Poverty and Corruption*

A majority of the Nigerian populace live in abject poverty. They are disenchanted, neglected and frustrated. Successive governments have only paid lip-services to poverty eradication such that those elected into public offices are no longer trusted and election periods provide an avenue to make money no matter how little. Ojo (2006; 111) observes that the poor depends on the rich for survival, while the rich predominate in politics as gladiators, the poor becomes either onlooker, apathetic or instruments in the hands of the rich to achieve their political ambitions. Those who are not rich are being confined to mere voting and political careers becoming the privilege of those who are wealthy enough to afford the investment in politicking.

The implication, with particular reference to the African continent, as aptly captured by Ake (1995: 240) is that “in accepting bribe for her vote, the peasant colludes in commoditizing her democratic right and reinforces her subordination, thus turning election into bondage.” Despite the increase in government revenues in recent years, Human Rights Watch (op cit: 32-33) observes, corruption and mismanagement remain a major cause of Nigeria’s failure to make meaningful progress in improving the lot of ordinary Nigerians. These financial factors are closely entwined with the rampant political violence in Nigeria. Public revenues are not only stolen and misused, but often used to pay for the services and weapons behind the political violence. Because violence and corruption make political competition a very expensive endeavour in Nigeria, many politicians are far more accountable to powerful and violent political godfathers who sponsor them than they are to their constituents. While Nigeria’s government earned an estimated \$223 billion during the eight years of the Obasanjo administration alone, between 50 and 90 million Nigerians live on less than one US dollar a day and per capita income stands at one-third the level it had reached in 1980. Nigeria also has some of the worst socio-economic indicators in the world. As noted in the Independent Electoral Assessment Team Report (2010:5), this widespread extreme poverty amid massive wealth concentrated in the hands of a few creates a context

where political elites enjoy enormous advantages over the impoverished public, and where voters and other stakeholders are vulnerable to financial inducements and intimidation.

## 6. Concluding Remarks

Elections are the indispensable root of democracy. Although this is universally accepted, credible elections depend on high standards before, during and after votes are cast. Opposition organizations must be free to organize and campaign without fear. There must be a level playing field among candidates. On polling day, voters must feel safe and trust the secrecy and integrity of the ballot. And when the votes have been counted, the result must be accepted no matter how disappointed the defeated candidates feel. When the electorate believes that elections have been free and fair, they can be a powerful catalyst for better governance, greater security and human development. But in the absence of credible elections, citizens have no recourse to peaceful political change. The risk of conflict increases while corruption, intimidation, and fraud go unchecked, rotting the entire political system slowly from within (Annan, 2012:3).

In order for elections to peacefully and credibly resolve the competition for governmental office and provide a genuine vehicle for the people to express their will as to who should have the authority and legitimacy to govern, governments must ensure equal protection under the laws on election-related rights, and effective remedies when they are broken. Governments must take forceful steps to ensure the politically impartial and effective functioning of the whole range of state institutions, including public safety and security agencies, prosecutors and courts, as well as competent EMBs, to guarantee elections with integrity (Global Commission on Elections, Democracy and Security, 2012:40).

It has been affirmed that in a liberal democracy, elections are not only the basis of a democracy but they are also one of the major acceptable ways the governed communicate with those who govern. They offer the electorate the opportunity to indirectly participate in decision making by choosing their representatives thus making them accountable. Moreover, elections in a democracy confer power, authority and legitimacy on a government. The crisis of legitimacy on the part of successive governments in Nigeria is a major concern to democracy advocates and scholars alike, particularly when viewed from the nature of the electoral process.

It is no longer in contention, therefore, that some measures should be put in place to halt the electoral degeneration that is fast getting the country's democracy off track. There seems to be little or no improvement in the elections consecutively held since 1999. For instance, there is consensus that the 1999 elections were better than those of 2003 and those of 2003 far better than what we witnessed in 2007. The 2009 governorship re-run in Ekiti state was also as controversial as the ones before it. The assessment that the 2011 general elections were relatively fair and better than the previous ones could only be partially sustained for the presidential election.

The electoral reforms process in Nigeria has generated a lot of interests from civil society organisations and politicians. This is not unexpected considering the electoral flaws identified in this essay. For instance, the Civil Society Coordinating Committee on Electoral Reform, CSCC (2008:4), recommends that the Electoral Commission should be a citizen-based controlled institution, with representation from the civil society, labour, faith based organizations, women groups, youth, people with disability, professional associations, organized private sector and political parties. The committee also suggests (among other recommendations) that the constitution should be amended to provide a mandatory minimum of 35% Affirmative Action for women; to include disability as a prohibited ground of discrimination; establishment of a Political Parties' Registration Commission; establishment of an autonomous and constitutionally recognized Electoral Crimes Commission(ECC); and an Alternative Electoral System (Proportional Representative) to address the challenges being experienced under the current electoral system.

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