



State, Governance And Regional Integration In Africa

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Political Science and the Responsibility of Election Management in Nigeria: A Structural Approach towards the Consolidation of our Democratic Momentum!

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Abstract

The paper examines the intellectual nexus between the art of politics and the study of political science in Nigeria. This link can be seen in the examination of the role of political science in the intellectual sensitization on the enhancement of election management and political theorization in the democratic dispensation of Nigeria. Given that election is a critical element of all democratic systems and a hallmark of the political praxis in the country, the paper used the extant historical data, in the country's political experiences to demonstrate the progress in the consolidation of democratic governance. Moreover, it conceives election management as an integral part of the consolidation of liberal democracies across the world, and as such made it the analytical focus in the evaluation of the level of democratic maturity of the country's political system. Therefore, using the structural functional approach, the paper argue that the political scientist has a formidable role to play in the socialization and sensitization of the electorates in Nigeria on the dynamic processes of the electoral management, in order to stimulate an understanding of the status of this crucial political activity. It recommends, among other things, that the Nigerian political scientist should evolve pragmatic paradigms, within the Nigerian context, that can help to complement and consolidate the gains of the political renaissance in current political culture of the people.

Keywords: Democracy, Political scientist, Election management, Structural functionalism.

Introduction

Since the emergence of what Huntington described as the “third wave” of democratic government in Nigeria, in May, 1999, the nation have had to grapple with a myriad of challenges to her democratic consolidation. Despite the high hopes and expectations, a cognitive dissonance continues to dot historical analysis of the country's transition. She has moved steadily from one phase of democratization to the other, with relative caution and daring anxiety. In fact, democracy has become a delicate variable in the political development of Nigeria. However, despite the logic of pessimisms that were expressed at the eve of the latest transition to democracy, i.e. the fourth republic, the country has shown a measure of determinism in her rigorous meander through the murky waters of political democratization, in the face of

economic deprivation. We have, as often shown that as a people, we are destined for greater heights.

The democratic journey for Nigeria, as for many African countries, has been evidently eventful, tumultuous and yet unstable. According to (Ake, 1991) the 'issues of democratization and human rights are increasingly the world's interest in Africa overcoming a legacy of indifference to the fate of democracy on the continent', thereby reinforcing the determination of Africans to fully take charge of the decision making process in their countries. It is in this context that Nigerians also took up the task of ensuring democracy in the country. Through the courageous confrontation of the undemocratic military dictatorships, the country eventually entered into the league of world democracies, in 1999.

However, regardless of the privileges and opportunities that the fledgling democratic experiment in Nigeria might bring, there has been a terrible manifestation of some degree of political problems that manifested in the form of violence, corruption, nepotism as well as maladministration. All these problems in a democratic system have exacerbated the palpable discord between the people and their government. Unfortunately, some of these problems are partly a function of the electoral process that determines the caliber of politicians that take control of the affairs of the country.

It is therefore against this backdrop that this paper seeks to examine the dynamics of election management and the intellectual role of the scholars of political science. It seeks to give a theoretical and structural panacea, in the establishment of a formidable electoral process for the country and the fulfillment of the ultimate goals of an ideal liberal democracy in the lives of ordinary Nigerians.

To these ends, this paper will give a succinct background check on the democratic evolution of Nigeria. In this regard, it would focus on the critical electoral process that is technically the major hallmark of all democratic governments. The importance of effective, free fair and efficient electoral process and management cannot be overemphasized. As such, this section will be subsequently followed by the appraisal of the gains and challenges of the prevailing system of elections in Nigeria, with a deliberate attempt to proffer alternative solutions to the possible challenges of the future.

Democracy as a concept and phenomenon in Nigeria

Over the years, the Democratic experiments in Nigeria have been relatively problematic, in terms of conducting credible elections (Abbass, 2008). Since representative democracy conceptually connotes a legitimate government that is elected freely and fairly on competitive political platforms, at regular intervals by the people, it is necessary to note that those saddled with power are supposed to be accountable and responsible (Shievely, 2001). This is so because, the process of administering these elections is central to the performance and efficacy of representative democracy. Similarly, it is a yardstick, not just for testing the popularity of a politician, but also for ensuring that political office holders are checked by the power of the people to extend or terminate their tenure.

Although some pundits have argued that, “Democracy does not guarantee security of tenure of office” notwithstanding specifying such tenurial appointment as can be challenged in accordance with established institutional or legal framework and mechanisms (Jega, 2007). Indeed, the ability of the country’s democracy to enter into the phase of tenurial appointment and performance determinism is central to the need for an effective electoral system. This will then have a multiplier effect on good governance, which (Oyovbaire, 2007) sees as the proper use of legitimate power and authority in the affairs of the people. This is the fulcrum upon which participatory democracy is impinged.

Salami (2010) has noted that Democracy should not be used to only describe the processes and procedures of political recruitments in which political parties and individuals compete for political power. Rather, democracy is the totality of rules, procedures, processes, practices and principles that regularly define and shape citizens’ orientation to politics and competition over political and social goodies in manners that are open, transparent and accountable (2010:87). Quite notably, participation, accountability and responsibility constitute core issues in representative democracy. On the one hand, the people determine who rule over them and the rulers are expected to be responsible and accountable to the people. Elections are therefore conducted periodically to achieve part of the goals of democracy.

Perhaps even more central to the concept of democracy is the process that leads to the determination of the set of people who would oversee the affairs of the people over a given period of time. As such, the electoral process is arguably as crucial as the deliverance of good leadership to the people.

In this regard, the electoral management of the process of conducting elections in Nigeria requires serious evaluation. To be fair, elections in most democracies across the world are not perfect. Nevertheless, the responsibility to ensure improvement in the election process in Nigeria cannot be taken for granted. This is so because the institutionalized structures of the state can only get to function optimally when they are occupied by competent and responsive individuals who have the moral duty to serve the interest of the people who elected them in the first place.

Elections Management in Nigeria

The history of election administration in Nigeria since the beginning of the fourth Republic has always been almost the same. There is, more often than not, the general tendency of politicians to seek to manipulate the process to their own advantage (Odofin, 2007). The alleged assertion by the then President of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, in 2007, that the General elections is “a do or die affair” is a testimony to this attitude. (Daily Independent, Feb. 23, 2007). In fact, the prevalence of various acts of electoral indiscipline has been almost a constant trend in the Nigerian political landscape. This, of course may not be unconnected with the process of administering elections in the country, which gives the gloomy impression that ‘he who plays the piper, dictates its tune’.

Election administration connotes the organization and conduct of elections to elective/ public offices by an electoral body (Iwara 2010). Furthermore, the

components of election administration include structure and process. Structure connotes the bureaucracy that is set up to organize election while the process has to do with the rules, procedures etc that governs the conduct of elections. Despite the protracted emphasis on the respect for the rules of the game, and acceptance of election outcomes in good faith, the distrust of the various electoral institutions has made this advice difficult to abide by. Therefore, politicians tend to have the impression that they can only seek to legitimate control of power through illegitimate means. Accordingly, Jinadu (1997) averred:

the indeterminacy of elections, that is, the possibility of erstwhile winners becoming losers and erstwhile losers becoming winners- which as an inherent and necessary prerequisite of liberal democratic politics is to a large extent a function of an impartial election management (1997:67).

The collapse of autocratic regimes paved the way for democratic institutionalization (Bratton and van de Walle 1997).

Although the tale of our electoral system is not entirely hopeless as the above illustration seems to reveal, it is nevertheless an irking problem that challenges the very premise of running a Peoples government and exercising their mandate when they do not believe in the process that brought you to office, to start with. Fortunately, however, the recent introduction of the electronic voting system, particularly the card reader, served to reduce the traditional tendencies to openly rig elections by stuffing the ballot boxes and even forging election results among many other maladies. It is therefore a positive harbinger of structural and holistic credibility of the conduct of future elections that can be less prone to both physical and systematic manipulations.

Therefore, the use of card readers in the 2015 general election can therefore be described as an unprecedented masterstroke in the electoral history of the country. The biggest challenge that confronts this innovation is the disturbing acquiescence demonstrated by Nigerians and pessimisms of some analysts about the structural security of the process.

INEC and Election Management in Nigeria

Following the proposal by the military regime of General Abdussalam Abubakar to voluntarily transfer political power to a civilian government in 1999, through a democratic process, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was established as a structure of government through the instrumentality of law to manage the electoral process in Nigeria.

The establishment of INEC marked the sixth in the series of Election Management Bodies in the anal of Nigeria's quest for democracy. The previous EMBs include, Electoral Commission of Nigeria (ECN), Federal Electoral Commission (FEC), Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO), National Electoral Commission (NEC) and National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON) (Omotola 2007). The change in names was just to reflect the difference in administration.

The Independent National Electoral Commission was established by Decree 17 of 1998, now Act of National Assembly Section 153 (1) (f) and elaborated in the Third Schedule Part I (F) of the 1999 Constitution. INEC with its head quarters in Abuja, has offices in all the thirty-six States of the federation including the FCT and in the seven hundred and seventy-four (774) Local Government Areas. However, despite the robust nature of electoral bodies' structure, there are often overwhelming challenges that characterize most elections in the country.

It is this tendency that underscores the importance of socialization and enlightenment of the people on the merits of embracing this change and ensuring that the people are not left out of the process of engineering reforms to the electoral process, only to be asked to cast their votes in a way that is completely strange to them. The duty to enlighten the people is a herculean one. It cannot therefore be left to the electoral body, INEC alone. Indeed, other stakeholders such as the civil society groups and the academics must be involved. Particularly noteworthy in this regard is the role of the political scientist.

The Role and Relevance of the Political Scientist

In Nigeria, it was Professor Sam Oyovbaire that once argued that the responsibility of political science in Nigeria was to socialize and sensitize the people of Nigeria on the ideals of politics and governance. This paper seeks to examine the importance of this socialization duty as captured in the structural functional framework of Gabriel Almond. The theory posits that in order to ensure the optimal performance of the political system, demands on it must be socialized, aggregated and articulated in a way that it can reproduce the expected effects that would eventually elicit support from the environment. It will also appraise the level to which the scholars of political science have gone in doing this moral obligation. However, it is important to note that the specific contributions of political science, as with any other academic discipline to the society can hardly be readily measured. There is a considerable consensus, however, that the impact of most disciplines can only be felt when they are viewed as complimentary to other practical efforts that are tied to governmental policies.

Let me narrate a short story, I was recently on a social media platform when a user asked the question that "what is the relevance of Political science in Nigeria?" As usual, there were all sorts of funny responses, ranging from nothing to teaching government in secondary schools! And of course this is not really a strange scenario. But what particularly struck me most was the shallowness of most of the respondents' mentality that was reflected in their various responses. It was quite pathetic indeed that there is so much disconnect between the outputs from our 'ivory towers' of our universities and the country's policy trajectory. Thus it is against this backdrop that this paper charges that the political scientists will have to play, and continue to play crucial role in the political milieu of Nigeria.

Meanwhile, before we proceed to discuss the specific roles that Political Science can play in the consolidation of the entire democratic rubric of Nigeria, and particularly the electoral system, it is instructive that we state categorically what

political science is and who is considered a political scientist in this paper. This will help put the discourse in the proper perspective.

Arguably, because of the fluid and pervasive nature of politics, both in art and in science, there is a tendency to have all kinds of people discussing the subject and practicing the art. And honestly some do excellently well in it, even without having gone through the intellectual training of political science or any politics related subjects. But this occupational misfit must not be taken for granted. The line and boundary that differentiate a Political Scientist from others is not a tenuous one, people may assume.

To be clear, a political scientist is a person who is sufficiently trained and grounded in the science of analyzing the art of politics. S/he must have gone through the systematic drills of putting political issues into proper methodological perspectives that will enable even the least educated audience to grasp the information that is been disseminated. This, in a nutshell, is our ideal Political Scientist. And the role that s/he has to play is that of sensitization, socialization thoughtful enlightenment.

The reason and merit for the isolation of the Political Scientist for this collective duty is rational one. It is predicated on the assumption putting the right peg in the right hole. In all progressive societies, there is the religious application of the logic of division of labor, in all spheres of human endeavor. It is a productive implementation of the cliché, put square pegs in the right hole. Nigeria cannot afford to be left on the sidelines in the practice of this putative wisdom. As such, there must be a quick resurgence of the ideal political scientist in Nigeria to set out to answer the natural call that his or her training demands.

In this sense, the collective of trained scholars, teachers and even students of Political science must put hands on the deck and revive the intellectual vigor that ignited Europe during the renaissance period. We must revive the culture of studying and teaching to inform reform and sensitize the society and emancipate our people. But in carrying out this mission, there must be a functional body of regulators and moderators of views and input paradigms that would act as gate keepers. And intuitively, one is pricked to ask, where are the research centers on democracy and good governance? What has been their inputs and contribution to the evolution of home grown ideologies and heuristic paradigms? The answers are not far-fetched. It is this type of gap and laxity on the part of our scholars that egged my curious social media friend to ask his question in the first place.

Conclusion: The Future of Election Management in Nigeria

The foregoing analyses have attempted to put into focus the peculiarity of the democratic politics in Nigeria. It identified the conduct of elections in the country as a critical element in the democratization endeavor of the Nigerian political system. Therefore, it revealed that the technical improvement in the administration of elections in the country needs to be sustained. To this end, it emphasized the central role of the Political Scientists in the sensitization of the people in the accurate

antecedents and past endeavors of the country in order to stimulate a resounding moral and collective resolve to preserve the gains of our democracy.

In addition, there must be a renewed vigor to educate the people on the genuine and accurate history of country and also sensitize them on the realities of the world in general. This will enhance the collective resolve of Nigeria to redouble our efforts towards the sustenance of the relative momentum that we have built and consequently ensure a permanent place for popular and functional democracy in the political culture of Nigerian.

Therefore, as the people of Nigeria glide on through the whirling wind of liberal democratic politics, the credibility of future elections and the outcome of their conducts would be a pendulum that will determine whether democracy will thrive for aye or wither away like it has always done in the past. As such, any effort to forestall this must therefore include the ability of electoral body to collaborate with extant professional political science bodies. As we anticipate the next rounds of elections in the country, come 2019, the cry for action is loud and the time to act is now! “a stitch in time saves nine”.

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