

THE POLITICAL PROCESS AND GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA: ROLE OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND INDEPENDENT NATIONAL ELECTORAL COMMISSION, 1999-2018

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Abstract

This work evaluates the political process and governance in Nigeria between 1999-2018 with emphasis on the role of the National Assembly and Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The political process comprises the totality of the ways and means of acquiring and exercising governmental authority in a political system. It is the systematic series of actions and guidelines involving relevant institutions that impact on the quest for the exercise of political power in governmental or public affairs of a country or state through periodic elections. The broad objective of the thesis centered on the evaluation of how the role of the National Assembly and Independent National Electoral Commission could enhance good governance in Nigeria. It employed the survey method of research design in which the data required for the study were generated through the instruments of questionnaire, and in-depth interviews. Quota and stratified sampling techniques were mostly used in the selection of respondents. Four hundred and thirty copies of questionnaire were administered and 360 were returned. The data were analyzed using linear regression analysis, as well as inferential statistics, tables, frequencies, percentages and graphs to crystallize and present the results. The findings among other things indicate that both the National Assembly and Independent National Electoral Commission have not satisfactorily performed their constitutionally assigned roles of enhancing the political process and good governance in Nigeria between 1999-2018; that the National Assembly has not been able to represent the collective interest of the masses; that the inability of the National Assembly to enforce the provisions of the 1999 constitution as they relate to cross-carpeting of politicians elected into the National Assembly or any other elective office in Nigeria is because such an amendment and interpretation will adversely affect the National Assembly members who are currently benefiting from the dispensation; and that although the introduction of technology in the management of elections will help advance the political process in Nigeria, however, due to poor voter education, the huge amount spent for this project would be a colossal national loss except urgent steps are taken by INEC to embark on appropriate voter education to enable the electorates and masses know how the technological equipment are used to facilitate free and fair elections subsequently in Nigeria with a view to advancing democracy in the country.

Keywords: Governance, Independent National Electoral Commission, National Assembly, democratic governance, Nigeria

1. INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian Political Process could be said to be volatile, with serious implications for attaining the objectives of governance (Agbu, 2016). Although several institutions and agencies play key roles in the political process in Nigeria, and these include the Legislature (National Assembly), INEC, the Executive, the Judiciary, the Nigeria Police Force, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Media, Political parties, and International Donor Agencies, this study however focuses on the role of the National Assembly (comprising of the Senate and the House of Representatives), and the Independent National Electoral Commission and their roles in enhancing good governance in Nigeria. The underlying logic is that the National Assembly which is the arm of government that articulates and gives a wholesome expression to the collective will of the people and has the overall responsibility of enacting the laws that govern the political and electoral processes and the Independent National Electoral Commission which is charged with the responsibility of conducting elections in Nigeria remain indispensable democratic institutions in the political process (Laski, 1992; Heywood, 2007; Bernick and Bernick, 2008; Okoosi-Simbine, 2010). Further, it is impossible to build and consolidate democratic governance without an institutionalized legislature and an impartial electoral management body (Davies, 1998).

Since 1999, both the Legislature and Independent National Electoral Commission have undergone several reforms aimed at evolving an enduring political process that could enhance good governance. The recurring challenges characteristic of the Nigerian political process underlie the need for the strengthening of both the National Assembly (Legislature) and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in order for them to play the role expected of them (Jega, 2011). However, the issues that this study sets out to examine are to what extent have both the National Assembly and the Independent National Electoral Commission been able to perform their roles in order to strengthen the political process for good governance in Nigeria?

What are the constraints faced by the National Assembly and Independent National Electoral Commission in advancing the political process and governance in Nigeria? What are the effects of the constraints faced by the National Assembly and Independent National Electoral Commission on their role of improving political process and governance in Nigeria? What structures should be put in place by the National Assembly and Independent National Electoral Commission in line with international best practices in order to enhance the political process for good governance in Nigeria?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Concept of Political Process

The political process comprises the totality of the ways and means of acquiring and exercising governmental authority in a political system (Wheare, 1963; Nwabueze, 1983). The exercise of this authority (usually) by elected officials affect the people, the economy and the international system (Wheare, 1963; Nwabueze, 1983; Bassiouni, 1998; Beetham, 1998). According to Almond & Coleman (1960), there are certain functions that a political system must perform in order to survive. These functions are divided into inputs and outputs functions. The inputs include (i) political socialization and recruitment (ii) interest aggregation and (iii) interest articulation (iv) pattern maintenance and adaptation (v) rule making (vi) rule application and (vii) rule adjudication.

This implies that the role of effective conduct of governmental affairs which includes policy formulation, law making, implementation and enforcement of the laws, as well as administration of justice must be performed by the three major arms of government: Executive, Legislature and Judiciary and their agencies in the overall interest of the people (Ball, 1977; Nwabuzor & Mueller, 1985; Magill, 2001). Accordingly, the effective performance of these roles lead to the provision of adequate security to the people as well as other basic needs thus guaranteeing their political and socio-economic development (Nwabuzor & Mueller, 1985; Gill, 2002).

Different theoretical perspectives on the management of the political process and its implications for governance abound, however, this study adopts Governance theory as the theoretical framework of analysis.

The governance theory is prominent in the works of Rosenau, 1992, Archer (1994), Jessop (1995), Rhodes (1996), Stoker, 1998 and Ewalt, (2001).

Governance has been used to describe the interaction among states operating at the international system characterized by its volatile or anarchic tendencies as compared to the art of 'governing' that is focused on

the execution or implementation of policies and programmes with the active participation of other stakeholders like the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and the citizenry which invariably impact on their lives and total wellbeing (Rosenau, 1992; Rhodes, 1996; Magnette, 2003; Benz & Papadopoulos, 2006; Peters & Pierre, 2009). Governance can also be multi-level in nature (multi-level governance) where the emphasis is on the interplay of actors operating within the subnational and supra-national spheres with conflicting interests but increasing benevolent central power that is willing to acquiesce or loosen its hold on power and authority in the area of policy making and implementation in order to achieve set goals for all parties and levels of governments involved (Bache & Flinders 2004; Peters & Pierre 2004; Schmitter & Niemann 2009). However, this kind of governance focuses on networking with other actors and stakeholders, both public and private in a manner reflective of network governance by operating in a diffused and non-hierarchical manner with the overall intention of achieving the collective interest of all (Börzel & Panke 2007; Sørensen & Torfing, 2007; Peterson 2009). Accordingly, Pollack (2015) has argued that in so far as governance is defined differently, it can be viewed as a set of theoretical approaches rather than a self-sufficient theory (Pollack 2015, P.35). In addition to this, governance has been conceived as mostly an analytic and descriptive concept (Moraru, 2016).

Inefficiency and illegitimacy of governments have been linked to lack of inclusiveness of other critical stakeholders in policy formulation and implementation. Governance is therefore opposed to the old bureaucratic way of government and recognises the importance of collaboration of all the stakeholders in the polity including the private sector, the Civil Society Organisations, Non-Governmental Organisations, and other sectors in service delivery of government (Archer, 1994; Ikeanyibe, 2016). It blurred the boundaries within and between public and other sectors – profit and non-profit (Ikeanyibe, 2016), and reconfigures the role of the public sector through citizen participation and network governance (Wu & He, 2009). However, this study recognizes governance as a paradigm shift in the old system of governing and envisages that the people be carried along to drive the process of governance as a collective action and not just a policy emanating from the government and its agencies. In line with this thinking, this study adopts the governance theory that is collaborative of the actions of the masses in institutionalizing a healthy political process that results in free and fair elections and not a process that divorces or alienates the people from the whole electoral process. However, as Massuh (1998) has evidently argued, the quality of participation of the masses in governance as envisaged by the governance theorists depends on the level of political, social and economic empowerment of the citizenry as well as the information available to them.

The governance theory could be effective in addressing the issues of governance in societies with high level of literacy and social welfare where the majority of the citizenry are actively engaged in governance in terms of policy formulation and implementation. In the developed democracies of USA and Europe with high level of literacy and social welfare that can inspire an unhindered participation in governance, the theory can be a very useful tool for mass mobilisation in both political and national life. However, in the Sub-Saharan Africa (Nigeria inclusive), where the level of literacy is low with poverty ravaging the greater percentage of the populace, governance theory will have limited applicability. Further, due to high incidences of vote buying and selling in these emerging democratic societies, the efficacy of inclusiveness in governance and accountability of the political class to the masses will be nonexistent. The implication is that the power of the people to exercise meaningful control over the political class through the instrumentality of free and fair election which the governance theory envisages will be largely compromised on the platform of instant financial and material gratification. This is because majority of the electorates that have dispensed of their franchise will hardly have the moral grounds to demand for accountability and good governance from the corrupt political class.

It is also noteworthy to remark that modern governance has assumed a lot of complexities and rationality both in terms of decision making and implementation. Accordingly only a well informed and educated citizenry can be trusted to play the active role in governance as expected of them under the governance paradigm. However, in spite of the limitations of the Governance theory, it still remains a more benevolent theory compared to other theories especially the Elites theory in so far as it considers the needs and expectations of the masses in policy formulation and implementation, even though this is accomplished through their elected representatives. In the final analysis therefore, a lot still hinges on the system and the mechanisms that are put in place to bring into effect the desired outcome within the polity which is good governance (Ibietan & Ajayi, 2015).

Governance theory is a useful analytical tool in the understanding of the Nigerian political process, because it presupposes that there must be a healthy synergy between the political process and governance in Nigeria. This implies that if the Nigerian political process excludes the people by not taking into consideration their needs and expectations and reflecting them in key policies and decisions it is doomed to failure. This is because since the power to exercise political authority is derived from the people through free and fair

elections held periodically, any anti-people policies and programmes would mean the ultimate loss of the power to represent the people. Accordingly any political authority that is not exercised in consonance with the wishes and aspirations of the people in order to enhance governance objectives, by promoting the general wellbeing of the people, would mean the withdrawal of the authority by the people in subsequent elections. This implies that good governance which hinges on the promotion of the general welfare of the citizenry is the authentic platform for the continued exercise of political authority in a democracy. This is however dependent on how much the electoral process is free and fair, and is the true expression of the will of the masses as the experience of Nigeria since the Fourth Republic has proven this to the contrary.

3. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NIGERIAN POLITICAL PROCESS

The political process and attendant structure bequeathed to Nigeria by the colonial masters is foremost in the scale of the sources of the problems for the country (Eke, 1983; Davies, 1998). Prior to the forced amalgamation of the disparate groups in 1914, most groups had existed as distinct autonomous political communities or units. However, in a bid to safeguard her economic interests and reduce the cost of governance, Lord Lugard amalgamated the protectorate of Northern Nigeria and the colony and protectorate of Southern Nigeria on January 1, 1914 (Osaghae, 1998). The complexity and heterogeneity that marked the forced union became “a platform for the tortuous journey from the colonial creation in 1914 to the current complicated struggle for survival as a nation” (Ajayi & Fashagba, 2014:2). Although the Nigerian state came into existence in 1914, however, the desire by the British to govern Nigeria not as a country but for economic reasons provided a veritable platform that marred Nigeria’s sovereignty (Williams, 1967 cited in Ajayi & Fashagba, 2014, p.2; Agbu, 2016, p.16).

The British colonial government had to introduce a federal arrangement in 1954 due to the heterogeneous nature of the Nigerian society thereby paving the way for political parties and groups that were formed along ethnic and regional lines, who also drew their membership and support base among the various ethnic and regional groups (Ajayi & Fashagba, 2014). However, for more than sixty four years since the federal system of administration was introduced in Nigeria (1954-2018), the federal arrangement has continued to be vilified due to the several abuses to which the system has been subjected to by the political class. This has made some experts in Nigeria politics and government to argue that “the federal system has been on a trial” (Ajayi & Fashagba, 2014, p.3).

4. CONSTRAINTS OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND INEC IN IMPROVING THE POLITICAL PROCESS FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA

Ever since Nigeria returned to democratic rule in 1999 thereby marking the beginning of the Fourth Republic, the challenge has always been how to strengthen the political process for good governance. In order to underscore the constraints faced by both the National Assembly and the Independent national Electoral Commission (INEC) Four Hundred and Thirty copies of questionnaire were administered through random sampling to members of the National Assembly, INEC officials, Political parties, the Media and the Civil Society organisations out of which three hundred and sixty were returned. In addition to this in-depth one-on-one interview was conducted on the aforementioned population and the data obtained were analysed. The findings showed that both the National Assembly and INEC have the following constraints:

4.1 Lack of Political Culture

The study (328 or 91% of respondents) shows that the elected members of the National Assembly need frequent political enlightenment to imbibe political and democratic culture, as the National Assembly have continued to show signs of lack of strong democratic culture by their intolerance of opposition and the violent legislative actions of their members (Pye, 1995; Almond & Verba, 1995; Anazodo, Agbionu, and Ezenwile, 2012).

4.2 Bribery and Corruption

The study shows that bribery and corruption is a major constraint on the performance of both the National Assembly and INEC with 284 or 78.88% of the respondents in agreement that bribery and corruption constitute a major constraint on the performance of the National Assembly and INEC.

4.3 Executive and Legislative Crisis

This study shows that the legislators and the executives have continued to be at loggerheads with one another to the detriment of the masses. The masses are made to suffer because the elites who are the key managers of these institutions are always in conflict with themselves because their overriding motive hinges on the protection of their selfish political and economic interests and not the collective interests of the people

they are elected to represent (Farrell & Héritier 2007; Tilly, 2007; Schimmelfennig, 2001; Yusuf, Yusoff & Zengeni, 2018).

4.4 High Level of Corruption among INEC Officials

The study also showed that there is high level of corruption among INEC officials especially the adhoc staff. 244 or 67.77% of the respondents agreed that some INEC officials are corrupt.

4.5 Insecurity and Violence

The study (279 or 78.28% of the respondents) shows that insecurity and violence have negative effects on the performances of INEC during elections.

5 EFFECTS OF THE CONSTRAINTS ON THE POLITICAL PROCESS AND GOVERNANCE

Table 1: Effect of the Constraints Faced by the National Assembly and INEC in their Role of Improving the Political Process and Governance in Nigeria between 1999 and 2018.

Statements (n=360)	Support Freq (%)	Oppose Freq (%)	(p-value)
Monetization of politics	314 (87.22)	46 (12.78)	0.001*
Electoral fraud and rigging	269 (74.72)	91 (25.28)	0.001*
High cost of governance	318 (88.33)	42 (11.67)	0.001*
Lack of Trust in INEC as a neutral umpire	286 (79.44)	74 (20.56)	0.001*
High rate of youth unemployment	321 (89.17)	39 (10.83)	0.001*
Lack of internal democracy within the political parties	308 (85.56)	52 (14.44)	0.001*
Lack of infrastructural facilities and social amenities	312 (86.67)	48 (13.33)	0.001*
High level of political apathy	316 (87.78)	44 (12.22)	0.001*

*Statistically significant ($p < 0.05$)

5.1 High Rate of Unemployment

As shown in table 1 above, the study shows that high rate of unemployment especially among the youths is one of the factors threatening the political process and good governance in Nigeria. This is statistically significant as 321 or 89.17% of the respondents supported this assertion in comparison to those opposed to it (89.17% vs. 10.83%; $p = 0.0001$). Unemployment Rate in Nigeria averaged 12.31 percent from 2006 until 2018, reaching an all-time high of 38 percent in the second quarter of 2018.

5.2 Monetization of Politics in Nigeria

The study shows that monetization of politics is an effect of the constraints faced by the National Assembly and the Independent National Electoral Commission. This was statistically significantly higher than those opposing to it (87.22% vs. 12.78%; $p = 0.001$). The implication of this is that Nigeria's political process is highly monetized that the relevance of any member to the party or its machinery is a function of the financial contribution made to the party's purse.

5.3 Electoral Fraud

The study shows that electoral fraud is an effect of the constraints faced by the National assembly and INEC in their role of enhancing the political process in Nigeria. This was statistically significantly higher than those

opposing to it (74.72% vs. 25.28%; $p=0.001$). This study therefore agrees with an earlier study by Agboola (2005) and Adegboye (2013) which indicated that electoral fraud has continued to emasculate the Nigerian masses thus creating political apathy.

5.4 High Cost of Governance

The study shows that high cost of governance continues to be a major threat to good governance in Nigeria. This was statistically significantly higher than those opposing to it (88.33% vs. 11.67%; $p=0.0001$). According to the World Bank report, one of the expected dividends of democracy has been the yearning for an improvement in the socio-economic conditions of the ordinary man which, quite unfortunately, has failed to come about (World Bank 2010).

5.5 Lack of Trust in INEC as a Neutral Umpire

The study shows that lack of trust in INEC as an impartial electoral umpire has continued to rise as 79.44% of the respondents agree that they lack trust in INEC as a neutral umpire. This was statistically significantly higher than those opposing to it (79.44% vs. 20.56%; $p=0.0001$). It can therefore be argued that this negative notion about INEC has been a major cause of violence during elections in Nigeria since 1999 to date.

5.6 Lack of Internal Democracy within the Political Parties

The study shows that lack of internal democracy within the political parties where political godfathers and mothers try to impose their 'anointed' candidates even though they may not be the popular candidates have continued to exacerbate crisis within Nigeria political process. This is statistically significant with 308 or 85.56% of the respondents supporting this assertion (85.56% vs. 14.44%; $p=0.0001$).

5.7 Lack of Infrastructural Facilities and Social Amenities

The study shows that another major effect of the constraints faced by the National Assembly and INEC on the quality of governance in Nigeria between 1999 and 2018 is lack of infrastructural facilities and social amenities. From the data gathered, 312 or 86.67% of the respondents supported the assertion and this was statistically significantly higher than those opposing it (86.67% vs. 13.33%; $p=0.0001$). Infrastructure and social amenities such as roads and bridges, recreational facilities, educational facilities, tourism, and hospitals contribute to economic development by increasing productivity and providing services, which enhance the quality of life (Gaal & Afrah (2017).

5.8 High Level of Political Apathy

Another effect of the constraints of the National Assembly and INEC that was evident in the study is the high level of political apathy, where 316 or 87.78% of the respondents supported the proposition that it was a major effect of the constraints faced by the National Assembly and INEC. This was statistically significantly higher than those opposing (87.78% vs. 12.22%; $p=0.0001$). Political apathy has remained a major threat to the Nigeria political process and good governance. The persistent concern among the electorate that their votes will not count as well as the fact that politicians cannot be trusted to keep their promises to the masses once elected into office have continued to affect the Nigerian political process negatively leading to a high level of political apathy (Agbu, 2016).

6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The object of this study was to evaluate the roles of the National Assembly and Independent National Electoral Commission in enhancing the political process and the quality of governance in Nigeria in future by drawing largely from past experiences especially between 1999-2018.

The processes and procedures recommended herein in the management of the political process and governance in Nigeria should be geared towards making the system compliant with the needs and expectations of the entire citizenry which is showing greater preference for electronic voting. The experiences of past elections conducted since 1999 to date show a growing concern about the lack of credibility of the electoral process. Although thuggery and violence have persisted in these elections, thereby leading to the disenfranchisement of many qualified electorate from voting, there has not been any serious effort by INEC to prosecute and punish electoral offenders. Lack of ideology seems to pervade in the political process such that cross-carpeting of politicians has been made so easy with no adverse consequences for those indulging in its practices. Vote buying seems to have been legalised and this practice is being fuelled by abject poverty and hunger in the land. The partisan nature of the military and other law enforcement agencies of government is unprecedented. Accordingly, with a myriad of problems confronting the Nigeria political process, there is no better time to call for a total embrace of technology in the management of

Nigeria's election including the full introduction and implementation of e-voting than now.

The study therefore affirms that in order to strengthen the political process and bring about enhanced good governance and stability in Nigeria, the participation of the citizenry in governance is crucial. This can be achieved when the electorate is allowed to choose who will represent them periodically in freely and fairly contested elections, where the sanctity of their votes is assured. The process must however be consistent with international best practices in the management of elections. Accordingly, until the masses especially the electorate are convinced that their choices to elect their leaders are respected and guaranteed, and that such elected officials are committed to the general welfare of the entire citizenry through inclusiveness in policy making, implementation and accountability, strengthening the political process for good governance would continue to be a difficult task. The following recommendations are put forward:

1. The introduction of technology in the management of Nigeria elections is a step in the right direction. However, there must be a concerted collaborative effort with the National Assembly, the Executive/Presidency and other local and international stakeholders to amend the legal framework thereby giving appropriate legal backing to enable INEC fully implement e-voting.
2. Adequate voter education should be embarked upon by INEC in order to educate the masses and the electorate on how to use technology in casting their votes.
3. The National Assembly should address the legal ambiguities associated with cross-carpeting such that any elected member that cross-carpet to another party in defiance of extant party guidelines and constitutional provisions shall lose his or her seat as enshrined in Chapter 5 (Part1C Section 68(g) of the 1999 constitution (As Amended).
4. The welfare system of the officials of INEC especially as they relate to the Adhoc staff should be revisited. Since these members of staff are on crucial national assignment it is suggested that a national insurance scheme of a reasonable amount that can sustain them and their families in case of death or permanent disability in the course of their jobs be set up. This will help dissuade some of them who may want to compromise the sanctity of elections conducted by INEC for personal gains.

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