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ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN NIGERIA: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF 2016 AND 2020 GUBERNATORIAL CONTESTS IN EDO STATE

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Abstract

Election is one of the vital pillars of democracy and in many African states democracy has become the most sought after. Unfortunately consolidating democracy through elections in Nigeria has been a herculean task. This is because successive elections in the country have been fraught with irregularities and unethical practices in the political process. It is made manifest by the behavior of political actors, whose stakes are high in the political, and in particular, electoral process. Past studies on elections and democratic consolidation however did not capture comparative analysis of the 2016 and 2020 gubernatorial contests in Edo State. The focus of this paper therefore is to investigate the gap created with a view to determining the place of elections in democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The objective was to comparatively review the 2016 and 2020 gubernatorial elections in Edo State, identify observed challenges and their implications for democratic consolidation. The discourse was also extended to identifying particular lessons from the 2020 gubernatorial elections in Edo State. This paper is descriptive and the methodology adopted was the use of secondary source of data such as textbooks, journals, magazine, newspapers and the internet to gather data for analysis. The finding is that the elections have not necessarily engendered democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Conclusively, since the human element in Nigerian politics had significantly contributed to the aberrations and absurdities that had characterized democratic practice and consolidation in the country, it only requires the enforcement of the rule of law to reinforce democratic consolidation.

Keywords: *Election, Democratic consolidation, Comparative Analysis, Gubernatorial Contests, Campaign, Strategy*

Introduction

One of the foundations of democracy is free, fair and regular election. The history of elections in Nigeria is traceable to the Clifford constitution of 1922 that introduced the elective principle which laid the foundation for subsequent elections in the country. In recognition of the significance of election as an essential component in any democratic process and as an instrument for change, nations have strived to improve the quality of their electoral process through constant reforms and evaluation of same. Unfortunately, as a major index for measuring democratic compliance and soundness, periodic election has presented an insurmountable challenge in the democratic process. Bratton and Posner (1999) had argued that periodic elections provide the best criterion for orderly leadership succession, entailing popular participation. Unlike the practice in advanced democracies, electoral activities in Nigeria, as the Edo State experience had shown, assumed an unprecedented level of brinkmanship, particularly as the contest and content of the election and campaigns respectively, were not based on issues. In assessing elections in Nigeria, Eleagu (2019) had argued that attempts at democracy through elections have only succeeded in providing battlegrounds for hooliganism, ballot snatching, theft of election materials, kidnapping and assassination of political opponents/rivals, arson, assault and physical destruction of election materials, intimidation, outright molestation or killing of election officials.

Free, fair and credible elections accord value and legitimacy to the government, its actions and policies while electoral malpractices constitutes a form of political corruption which devalues/destroys the legitimacy of government structures, escalates problem of national integration and democratic consolidation. Therefore, at the heart of the structures and functioning of any modern democratic society or state is election. Despite the fact that there were institutions to ensure free, fair and credible election in Nigeria such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Directorate of State Services (DSS), Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Police etc, unfortunately, they have failed in their responsibility of conducting free and fair election as well as sanitizing the polity. While their failure can be traceable to corruption, pressure from politicians, manpower shortage etc, the incidences

and preponderance of commercialization of the electoral process (in terms of vote buying and selling and huge monetization of the process of leadership recruitment within the political parties) is a further/practical confirmation of their failure to deliver on free and fair election.

Election and electioneering campaigns in Nigeria, as the Edo State experience showed, have proven to be ineffective in mobilizing the citizenry for democratic stability and consolidation. Invariably, winning or losing elections are not dependent on how hard the candidates campaign on ideological basis, but more on other variables. The question to interrogate therefore is, can election as the Edo State experience with 2016 and 2020 gubernatorial elections had shown, engender democratic stability and consolidation? This question is germane because arguably election does not suffice to ensure democracy and democratic consolidation though there is a nexus between good election and democratic consolidation. However, the reason for this investigation is because democratic process which includes the conduct of election such as that held in Edo State is relevant in an overall attempt to understand democratization and election in Nigeria.

The objectives of this paper therefore is to comparatively analyze the 2016 and 2020 Edo State gubernatorial elections, identify the implications of observed challenges for democratic consolidation and ascertain the lessons from the 2020 election in Edo State. Arising from the above, the questions to ask are: What are the differences and similarities in the 2016 and 2020 gubernatorial elections in Edo State? What were the implications of the observed challenges for democratic consolidation? What were the lessons from the 2020 election?

To actualize the above objectives, this paper was divided into seven sections. While section one is the introduction, the focus of section two is on methodology. Section three is concerned with conceptual discourse while section four is devoted to analyzing the character of 2016 and 2020 gubernatorial contests in Edo State and implications for democratic consolidation. Lessons from 2020 gubernatorial election in Edo State were identified and discussed in section five while section six was devoted to conclusion and recommendations.

Methodology

This paper adopted the descriptive method and gathered data from secondary sources. These sources included textbooks, journals, magazines, newspapers, and internet materials. The materials sourced were mostly on issues of elections, politics and democracy in Nigeria. Specifically, data gathered related to issues before, during and after the elections. Some of the newspapers sampled because of their wide coverage and availability included Daily Trust, Leadership, The Guardian, and The Nation. However, personal observation also played a fundamental role in strengthening the analysis.

Conceptual Discourse

Elections in any democracy are means of choosing and determining representatives into government. They provide a medium by which the different interest groups within a nation state stake and resolve their claims to power through peaceful means (Iyayi, 2005). Election involves the participation of the people in the act of electing their leaders and their own participation in governance. It therefore refers to a method of selection of persons to fill certain offices through choices made by an electorate; those citizens who are qualified to vote under the rule and procedures of the electoral system (Omotola, 2007). It also encompasses activities before, during and after elections, such as legal and constitutional frameworks of elections, the registration of political parties, conduct of party campaigns, the activities of the media, campaign financing, the activities of security agencies, the authenticity and genuineness of the voters register, electoral agencies, among others. Though elections are very fundamental in any democracy, elections in Nigeria since independence had been hotly contested and crisis-ridden because the stakes were usually high (Ojo, 2018). Among the political elites, personality, pride, greed and winner-take-all tendencies are usually at stake in every election. Other stakes are pathway it creates for primitive acquisition of wealth, opportunity it creates for elevation in status, huge capital investment (political entrepreneurship) in the electoral process that needed to be recouped; hence it assumes a do-or-die affair.

The importance of elections is based on the fact that it is the technical means

of ensuring popular participation in government and the democratic process by the citizenry. They are useful in building support and selection of leaders and policies. It enables the electorate to realize government of, by, and, for the people. It makes government accountable, responsible and responsive to the needs and yearnings of the people, since a bad government can be voted out of power during elections. It therefore represents the only way to ensure/establish majority rule and legitimacy of government. To actualize the above, voting becomes the mechanism, because it enables the citizen to express their interests and confidence as they freely elect people into government.

Elections, as argued by Mackenzie (1968) cited in Egwemi (2014), were the rituals of choice; and their binding character were derived from the participation of the individual as a chooser in a social act which confers legitimacy on the person chosen. They were also important in a democracy because it is through it that the people have the opportunity of accepting or refusing the people who are to rule them. As had been argued elsewhere, elections provide opportunity for political parties to perform their major role of presenting candidates for public office (Egwemi, 2014). Therefore, the hallmarks of *genuine* representative democracy are regular, free, fair and transparent election. The deliberate use of the term 'genuine democracy' is because all over the world, regimes exist which mount the term democracy but whose practices are at variance with the tenets of democracy (Egwemi, 2014). Such polities present attempts to create a semblance of elections and political parties.

Democracy is a popular concept in contemporary discourse. Its remote origin is from the Greek word *demokratia* (*demos* plus *kratia*) which means the rule by the people. While the democratic practice of the Greek city state may present the practice of direct democracy (where every citizen in a political community actively participate in the political process especially in decision making), the modern political system rather presents representative governments or indirect democracy (a system of government under which the people exercise governing powers indirectly or through representatives that were periodically elected). In its ordinary meaning, it is conceived as a system that allows the involvement of the citizenry in decision making. It refers to government of the people,

by the people and for the people. Democracy has the basic symbols, values common and defining features of free and competitive politics, toleration of opposition and right to dissent, regular periodic elections, multi party system, universal franchise, popular sovereignty, responsible government, political accountability, informed electorate, exercise of mandated power and indirect political participation, fundamental human rights, the idea of equality, justice and rule of law, freedom of choice, rule of popular consent, electoral credibility, constitutionalism, equality of opportunity, respect for the rule of the game, and supremacy of the people (Ojo, 2003; Oke, 2005). The irony in the Nigerian situation has been that the above tenets of democracy were celebrated in breach and violations than observance.

Democracy as an ideology is the philosophy of governance which sets a high premium on the basic freedom or fundamental human rights of the citizens, rule of law, the right to property, the free flow of information and the right of choice between alternative political positions (Obasanjo and Mabogunje, 1992 cited in Abdullahi, 2017). Thus, sovereignty in a democracy is vested on the people rather than a small clique as it is in Nigeria. However, calling a political system a democracy does not mean that it is good, foolproof or admirable. On the contrary is the argument that democracy has a link with development in a number of ways. It could be an instrument of development of society, if it guarantees popular participation in the affairs of the state, social justice and good governance. Through elected representatives, brought about by free, transparent and fair election, legitimacy is achieved and consequently, the dream of development is fulfilled (Ojo, 1997; Mato, Jacob, and Akintola, 2011). The irony of democracy in the Nigerian context is that, the above principles are honored more in their disregards, disobedience and violations than observance and adherence. Besides, the crises of democracy as the Nigerian experience had shown, is the manipulation of the above basic principles by the elites to suit selfish ends as exemplified in prevalence of political godfathers in contemporary Nigerian politics. In the light of the above, Ojo (2018) argued that what has been operated thus far in Nigeria is an *abbreviated* form of democracy as the ideals of democracy which includes political competitiveness, inclusiveness, and accountability have been subverted.

Democratic Consolidation on the other hand relates to the challenge of making new democracies secured, avoiding democratic breakdown and disruptions, extending their life expectancy beyond the short term, and ensuring their immunity against the threat of authoritarian regression (Schedler, 1988). In identifying features that can help in consolidating democracies, Ojo (2003) argued that they include democratic citizenship, democratic attitude, electoral credibility, cohesiveness, established political culture, and flourishing political parties. Other often neglected but important requirement for democratic consolidation, as argued by Karl (1998) and Jonas (1989) cited in Ojo (2003), were the predominance of institutions that faithfully translate individual preferences into public policy through majoritarian rule; the incorporation of an ever-increasing proportion of the population into the process of decision making; and the continuous improvement of economic equity through actions of governing institutions. Baker (2004) also corroborated the above when he argued that consolidation of democracy reflects the ability of political institutions to “transform societal demands into effective policy options that serve as channels of realizing political aspirations for the majority of citizens”. It therefore means that a country that has not gone beyond electoral democracy or one that exists at a level of mere presentability cannot talk of consolidation.

Unfortunately, elections in themselves do not suffice to ensure democracy and democratic consolidation as the Nigerian experience has shown. This is because the electoral process has been manipulated often times in the past to aid, abet and enthrone autocracy, tyranny and unpopular governments. In a democracy, elections are free when the legal barriers to entry into the political arena were low, when competing candidates, parties and their supporters were free to campaign and when people could vote for whom they want without fear and intimidation (Diamond, 2009). It is only free and fair elections that can lend legitimacy to democracy by preventing one person or a small group in the society from imposing certain vested interests on the general population (Panyarachun, 2010). Since elections represent the expression of the collective will and consolidates democracy only when the voting and all that surrounds it are free and fair (Kornblith, 2005), it therefore means that elections that deviate significantly from such standards can serve different ends

- including the consolidation of an autocracy that disdains the very democratic mechanism it loosely and instrumentally claims to follow. Therefore, calling a political system a democracy does not mean it is good or an admirable system or that it does not need improvement. Features of previous elections in Nigeria that made democratic consolidation impossible included massive fraud, vote rigging, malpractices, political violence, falsification of results, imposition of candidates, institutional collaboration, structural impediments, godfatherism, individualistic tendencies, intense post election contestations, lack of ideologically driven political competition particularly among political parties and candidates, zoning, absence of issue-based campaigns, repression and intimidation of political opponents and absence of reliable opinion poll had already been documented in Odion and Anegbode (2015).

Though past elections in Nigeria have been contentious, it is against this background that one will begin to analyze the 2016 and 2020 gubernatorial elections in Edo State. This exercise is meant to determine if there were similarities and differences; and if elections as conducted in Nigeria could help in the course of democratic consolidation.

Character of 2016 and 2020 Gubernatorial Contests in Edo State and Implications for Democratic Consolidation

The 2016 and 2020 Edo State gubernatorial election presented features that were more of similarities than differences as identified in the discussions below. Electioneering campaign is one of the features used for comparative analysis in this paper. It is a period whereby the aspirants/political parties present their manifestoes to the voting public. Political campaigns often precede elections. The import was to enable the voting public assess the plans of the political party, and thereafter make choice. It is one of the foundations of democracy. Tukur and Awosanya (2004) cited in Surajudeen (2008), had argued that national campaigns as directed by the political party was to simplify as much as possible few issues which were regarded as vote winners. As the Nigerian experience had shown, and in particular, the build up to 2016 and 2020 Edo gubernatorial elections, electioneering campaigns had little to do with issues, policy and programmes. The campaign strategies adopted

by the political parties were similar in both elections. Organized rallies for purpose of character assassination, name calling, personality bashing, and distribution of face caps, blackmail strengthened by the use of social media, political debate, music, dance and local entertainment through songs and costumes mostly characterized the process. The implication was devaluation or diminished quality of campaigns in Nigeria, and ineffectiveness in mobilizing the citizenry for democratic stability and consolidation. On the other hand, while the content of the campaigns remained the same, the difference between the environments of the two campaigns was that the 2020 election, held in the midst of government imposed Covid-19 regulation that placed restrictions on organized mass rallies and physical convergence of citizen. This created an atmosphere where campaigns were done mostly on social and electronic media as well as posters. Hence, the campaigns were devoid of the usual face-to-face contact with candidates.

In 2016, government infrastructures were monopolized by the incumbent. Pavements, electric poles, major bill boards and buses, were adorned with posters of candidates of the ruling political parties. Access to utilize school premises were only granted to the ruling party, while opposition parties were disallowed. Intimidation, personality bashing, intolerance of opposition, and violence characterized the campaigns that preceded the election. The above were replicated in the 2020 elections in what has become a norm. Political tolerance, which has to do with the acceptance of political diversity in the society and a requirement for sustainable democracy was not reinforced by political actors before, during and after elections. The nature of pre-election campaigns, which was characterized by personalization of campaign, rallies turned into avenues for settling old scores, and projection of personal preferences/idiosyncrasies confirmed the above assertion. Attacks and counter attacks on real and perceived political opponent assumed the center stage while political clashes, kidnappings, shootings, bombings and assassinations represented expressions of political intolerance during the campaign period. Whereas denial of the use of government facilities by the opposition led to loss of revenue for the state government, and unlevelled playing field for aspirants, it further created sentiment and popularity for the opposition, even as grass root campaign were

strengthened in both elections.

Another noticeable feature of the 2020 election which impacted democratic consolidation was the over bloated National Campaign Council for the State gubernatorial election, for both political parties. While the Rivers State Governor - Nyesom Wike, led 77 Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) stalwarts, the Kano State Governor - Abdullahi Umar Ganduje, led 49 All Progressive Congress (APC) stalwarts. The large membership, which were drawn from 'high impact personalities', within the political parties was part of the strategy packaged by the political parties to intimidate each other. The membership however, overshadowed the candidates, and consequently, made the candidates to be less visible in the respective cases, such that even the electorates were confused and intimidated. The difference between the elections was that the campaign councils in the 2016 election was not over bloated as found in the 2020 composition.

One of the primary responsibilities of any political party is to mobilize the citizenry through their campaign and manifestoes. Unfortunately, the political parties in both 2016 and 2020 elections never had clear cut manifestoes, neither were they ideologically distinct. The above shortcoming coupled with previous failed promises, strengthened the argument that elections in Nigeria were not won on the basis of vigorous campaigns, political party manifestoes and ideological differentiations, but on other interlocking features such as a candidates' personality and integrity, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) manipulations, electoral malpractice, power of incumbency, and influence of money, captured in the 'stomach infrastructure' theory of Ayo Fayose (Odion, Anegbode, and Onakalu, 2017). The fact that political parties failed in their bid to capture the votes of the electorates through genuine conviction/campaign, based on their manifestoes, coupled with credibility crisis of the political leaders, manifested in the sale and purchase of votes by voters and contestants/parties, respectively in both elections. Thus, there was strong monetary influence which diminished the quality of the primaries, selection and election of candidates (JDPC, 2021). It could be explained as having been due to poverty and the inability of INEC to check the excesses of politicians. The lack of ideological distinction among the political parties however created confusion for the

electorate and consequently, impacted democratic consolidation.

Elections in Nigeria are arguably very contentious and often involved political violence. Political violence is a form of deliberate and politically motivated behavior by citizens or functionaries of state intended to disrupt social processes or visit serious harm on persons, valuable properties or public property. In very tense periods, disagreements among the major contending political parties had reinforced political violence before, during and after electoral politics in Nigeria. Often times, it was done to ward off political competition and control lever of power. The high stakes in politics sustains this phenomenon, and the consequence had been reinforcement of apathy, destruction of lives and properties as evidenced in past elections. In 2016, the convoy of Comrade Adams Oshiomhole was attacked in Owan during the campaigns while Mrs Ize-Iyamu experienced same in Auchi. Reminiscent of the violence that usually characterize Nigeria electioneering process, in 2020, the residence of the then Commissioner for Youth, Edo State –Mr. Damian Lawani in Udaba, Etsako Central Local Government Area, was attacked; Governor Godwin Obaseki and the PDP Campaign Council were attacked outside the Oba of Benin’s palace; and his (Governor Godwin Obaseki’s) convoy was also attacked in Apana (Ward 10), Etsako West Local Government Area, during the campaigns. On August 14, 2020, at Ikhin, Owan East Local Government Area, five APC youth were shot due to disagreement over sharing of party largesse. Political violence and intolerance are known to impart political participation and democratic consolidation negatively, reinforced political apathy and consequently political underdevelopment.

Furthermore, the practice during the 2016 and 2020 gubernatorial electioneering campaign was for major contending candidates to visit the traditional institutions in the communities. This cultural observance, besides connoting respect for tradition, also projects a belief that such acceptance and royal blessing were sanctioned by the ancestors, hence the confidence of going through the electoral process successfully. However, as the Nigerian experience had shown, protection, endorsement, royal blessing or pledge of loyalty, were the reasons for such visit to traditional institutions. Others were known to visit

the grave site of past political icons in the community and pledge loyalty with the assurance of replicating the ideals of the dead.

Odion (2019) had argued that cultural appeal has played a very fundamental role in electioneering campaigns and citizens mobilization in Nigeria. Embedded in culture were songs, language, dressing code, music, town hall and dance. They all represent the traditional methods, values and ideals which captures the life of the citizenry. The use of these features and symbols during the 2016 and 2020 Edo State gubernatorial electioneering campaigns may have enlivened the political process and reintroduced life into it, even in the face of contending challenges. Arguably, attempts may have been made by globalization to erode these basic cultural values and symbols and super impose foreign culture and values. As the Nigerian political experience had shown, the traditional features have played a cardinal role in the mobilization of the citizenry for participation in the political process, and Edo State is not an exception. For example, the entertainment of supporters with local cultural troupe, dance, and local/tribal songs and music, were to capture the attention of the voting public and mobilize them in order to secure electoral victory. In a multiethnic, multilingual and multicultural society such as Edo State, language serves as a medium for expression, mobilization and political communication. It is one thing that identifies the uniqueness of a given people. As a cultural behavior, it plays an inevitable role in framing and formulation of cultural patterns. Therefore, dancing, musical patterns, socio-political behavior, development, religion, among others were offshoots of language (Arheghan, 2009). Contemporary use of local language and dance by political aspirants and contestants during the 2016 and 2020 gubernatorial election in Edo State, conveyed meaning directly or indirectly to the citizenry and were meant to arouse the people as well as their attention and curiosity. Though it is arguably a tool for mobilization of the citizenry for participation in the political process, unfortunately, the threat posed by the use of music and other cultural appeals to democratic consolidation was that, they were often used to cover up the inadequacies of the aspirants/political party as they ended up only entertaining the people without actually presenting their ideology and manifestoes. This threatened the course and practice of democracy, as it rendered the purpose of electioneering campaigns

irrelevant. Consequently, as campaign grounds were turned into jamboree, the right to be informed through questions and answers was compromised and manipulatively denied the electorate and over ridden, while the concept of accountability which is the hallmark of good governance was thrown to the winds.

Lack of internal democracy in the process of the emergence of candidates for elections, was another major challenge that confronted all the political parties and made consolidation of democracy in Nigeria difficult. Internal democracy is the conduct of free and fair elections among members of a political party in an open and transparent manner, and at regular intervals with a ban on establishment of factions. In a nutshell, internal democracy also known as intra-party democracy refers to the level and methods of including party members in decision making and deliberations within the party structure. The lack of it is a major characteristic of Nigeria's political parties. In very many cases, the anointing of candidates by party elders and chieftains had not gone down well with other aspirants and political party members who felt shortchanged in the process. In the build up to the 2016 and 2020 Edo gubernatorial elections, similar scenario played out. It created easy passage for politicians to change platforms with ease and heat up the polity. Aggrieved party members took advantage of clogged channel to exit to other political parties, and sought the actualization of their relevance and aspirations. This was evidenced by the spate of defection, decamping or cross carpeting across the state, prior to the elections. While the candidate of the All Progressive Congress (APC) in 2016 gubernatorial election – Mr. Godwin Obaseki, defected to the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and became the party's candidate in 2020, the erstwhile candidate of the PDP in the 2016 gubernatorial election – Pastor Osagie Ize-Iyamu, also defected to the APC and became the party's candidate in 2020. As the Nigerian experience had shown, decamping/defections were done basically close to election periods, after primaries, during intra party feuds, when a political party experiences declining fortunes, response to lack of internal democracy, and at the emergence of a new political party. In the same vein, as the Nigerian experience has further shown, the purpose for decamping/defection was to secure relevance, accommodation, security (mostly within the ruling political party), and gain

access to power and expropriation of public resources. The implication was that political elites and parties without ideological leaning flooded the political landscape; and the political parties were weakened to the extent that they were unable to mobilize the citizenry for democratic consolidation and political development.

Again, the failure of the Nigeria political elites or leaders of political parties to obey the rule of law of their respective parties and the country had made democratic consolidation impossible. This remains a paradox that has posed fundamental problems for the growth of democracy in Nigeria. The Nigerian political elites had only shown minimal and superficial commitment to the symbols and principles of democracy as reflected in their political behavior (Ojo, 2003). Thus, the basic tenets of democracy which would have created prospects for democratic durability such as toleration of diversity, freedom of choice, right to dissent, rule by popular consent, electoral credibility, political accountability, rule of law, equality of opportunity, respect for the rule of the game and supremacy of the people are subverted and compromised. Recklessness was taken to the point of perpetrating illegality, violating rights, disobeying court orders and circumventing due process by political elites as exhibited in their desperation to capture power. On the whole, if Lucian Pye (1966) cited in Agbeba's (2003) argument that political development must be measured by a system's ability to resolve the crisis of development viz identity, participation, penetration, legitimacy, integration and distribution, as it move from traditionality to modernity, then it is obvious that the political elites, as the Edo State experience had shown, have not been able to resolve these problems.

In terms of security during elections in Nigeria, security agencies were often assigned critical roles. The idea is to police for a fraud and violence free elections. Within the context of elections and electoral process, the role of security agencies were to ensure that all stakeholders adhere to electoral guidelines; that all law abiding citizens were allowed to exercise their civic responsibility unhindered; and ensure that electoral personnel and materials were protected. However, partisanship of security agencies, which is supported by the fact that the occupants of highest echelon of the security outfits were appointees

of the President had been identified by Robert-Nyemetu and Obioha (2005) in past studies. In addition, though, former INEC Chairman – Professor Attahiru Jega, had argued that the heavy/massive deployment of security personnel during elections was to help ensure the successful conduct of elections (Agbese, 2014), unfortunately, the build up to the Edo elections were more of Police intimidation and lack of pro-activeness in curtailing violence, mostly during campaigns. The increase in the spate of pre-election attacks and counter attacks, that prefaced the election, indicated that the security agencies were not proactive. The deployment of 13,311 Nigerian Security and Civil Defense Corps (NSCDC) personnel and 31,000 Police personnel under the headship of Deputy Inspector General Adeleye Oyebode to Edo State in the 2020 election as against 25,000 Police personnel deployed for the same purpose in 2016 (an increase of 6,000), was an indication that the stakes were high. The increase in the number of security personnel represents a marked difference between the two elections (2016 and 2020) that held in Edo State.

Prior to the election, there were breaches manifested in clandestine interventions and intimidation. The show of strength by the law enforcement agents scared many voters which resulted in voter apathy. These were occasioned by security reports. For example, the hotel where the PDP National Campaign Chairman for Edo State in 2020 – Nyesom Wike, lodged was placed under siege by policemen. Though, there were still recorded incidents of violence during the election, massive security presence as experienced in the 2020 edition deterred escalation of occurrences.

On the part of INEC which represents the body that was saddled with the sole responsibility of supervising the conduct of elections, it was expected to play a fundamental role in the democratization process. Operationally, INEC was expected to provide a level playing field for all contesting political parties and ensure the confidence of the people in the electoral process, by making their votes count. In the build up to the 2016 election, INEC was challenged by a number of factors among which, litigations featured prominently. In the case of 2020 election, new and different challenges emerged prior to the election. In particular, the challenges in 2020 included litigations that arose from

deregistration of political parties by INEC before the scheduled date; conflicting Appeal Court judgments on deregistration of political parties by INEC; the nullification of the Bayelsa State Governorship election by the Bayelsa State Gubernatorial Petitions Tribunal, due to the deregistration and exclusion of the Advanced Nigeria Democratic Party (ANDP), from participating in the election; as well as political violence and other undemocratic practices. INEC could not also update its voters register prior to 2020 Edo State gubernatorial, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This excluded a large segment of the voting public who attained the voting age from being captured, as well as those that changed their residences/locations. Similarly, low performance of the card readers posed a major challenge during accreditation.

As part of INEC innovation, voters were made to be accredited and vote immediately, thus reducing the time spent on voting. In the same vein, a technology - Z-pad was introduced in the 2020 election and deployed for transmitting election results from the polling unit to the agency's website where citizens could log into and immediately access results. This technology was absent during the 2016 election. Unfortunately, the inability of INEC to monitor campaign and election financing had resulted in commercialization of elections.

The context within which the elections took place also differs. Whereas in 2016, the environment was congenial for elections to hold, in 2020 the elections were held in the midst of the raging and life threatening Covid-19 pandemic which came with its disruptions and constraints. New pandemic election guidelines were introduced just as the update of voters register meant for a credible election could not take place.

Other agencies that are instrumental in the consolidation process include Civil Society Organization (CSOs) and Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC). While the CSOs failed to expose undemocratic acts, the NBC has not been able to purge itself of partisanship, monitor campaign broadcasting and campaign of calumny with a view to sanctioning offenders.

Lessons from the 2020 Gubernatorial Election in Edo State

There are however, vital lessons to be learnt from the conduct of 2020 Edo gubernatorial election. This experience spans through pre-election, election and post elections. The argument here is that if these lessons are taken seriously, they are likely to contribute to democratic consolidation. The first major lesson was that a free, fair and credible election can be conducted in Nigeria. In an environment where elections were largely contentious, violent, conducted as war and characterized by gory carnage, the 2020 Edo Gubernatorial election arguably demonstrated that the electoral reform and innovations introduced were working.

Secondly, the issue of personality was still very important in determining who wins in an election. To this extent two perspectives can be considered. The first is the person directly contesting, while the second perspective is the person(s) behind the contestants (Egwemi, 2014). The person of Governor Obaseki was easier to market during the electioneering than by/for the PDP due to a number of reasons that ranged from his records of achievement during his first tenure then as a Governor prior to the election, closeness to the people and acceptability, support by PDP hierarchy, as well as the humiliating build ups that culminated in his defection. Arguably on the other hand, it was difficult to elicit the support of voters for Pastor Ize-Iyamu of the APC, given his previously damaged reputation by his political adversary turned arch supporter – Adam Oshiomole in 2020, when he first aspired to be governor under the PDP ticket. This was an albatross with damaging consequences. The difficulty experienced by the party could be traceable to lack of concrete evidence of performance to rival his opponent (even though the APC claimed credit for the achievements of Governor Obaseki in his first tenure), and dissatisfaction of the citizenry occasioned by failed promise of change by the APC at the national level.

A further lesson for Nigerian politics was that the outcome of the election indicated the relevance of emotional appeal and concretized the argument that godfathers in politics can be defeated by a mobilized electorate. The alleged dictatorial tendencies of the APC National Leader, Bola Tinubu (Jaji, 2014), who visited Edo State to canvass and direct Edo voters to vote out

Obaseki, notwithstanding, it was clear after the election that Tinubu could be demystified and his electoral structure dismantled/defeated. The electoral result was a clear confirmation of the slogan “*Edo no be Lagos*”. In addition, while the ruling National APC seemed to be the party to beat in the election with its structure, size, strength, finance and personalities, unfortunately the personalities associated with the party never had the appeal to win the election, such as the personalities in the other less popular parties and opposition PDP. Thus, this supports the argument that winning an election in Nigeria was not about the size of a political party but other interlocking variables such as the resolve of the electorate to vote their choice, past and present records in public office and power of incumbency. Obviously, democracy was about the people.

Arising from the above, a final lesson to learn is that democracy is about the people. The outcome of the election was a confirmation that sovereignty truly belongs to the people, and that the people’s power held in trust by the elected officers of any polity can be withdrawn (*or renewed*) by them during periodic elections (Sanusi, 2014). It has also been argued by scholars that democracy is about free choice (Ojo, 2003; Omotola, 2007; Diamond, 2009; Egwemi, 2010; Ojo, 2018).

Conclusion and Recommendations

In this paper, the importance of election in democracies was brought to the fore. Emphasis was placed on comparative analysis of the 2016 and 2020 gubernatorial contest in Edo State with a view to ascertaining if the elections could necessarily engender democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The character the elections assumed were not fundamentally different from previous elections. With the history of chequered elections and ‘abbreviated democracy’, consolidation is difficult. Though some lesson were learnt from the 2020 gubernatorial election in Edo State as shown in this paper, the human element in Nigerian politics had contributed significantly to the aberrations and absurdities that had characterized democratic practice in the country, hence made democratic consolidation in Nigeria a mirage. Thus, the drawbacks in the actualization of democratic consolidation and good governance are made realizable by human factor.

Arising from the above, we recommend the strengthening of institutions through capacity building. This requires that political parties be monitored by INEC and civil society organizations in order to ensure that actual voters' education using the instrumentality of electoral campaign periods was done. This is very germane as an informed electorate stands a better chance of making informed choices and decisions required for democratic and societal development. The effort of political parties should not be concentrated on capturing power at all cost and forming government alone.

The electoral regulating agency - Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has a duty to monitor the activities of political parties and candidates such that campaigns can be issues-based and not on attacks or criticism of one another. INEC has a duty to make absence at organized debate (without cogent reason and clearance from INEC), an offence in the Electoral Act that should attract sanction for the political party/candidate. When sanctions are imposed, quality campaigns will be engendered.

While not condemning the use of traditional symbols, effort must be made by INEC too to ensure that the inadequacies of political parties are not hidden while using these symbols. Therefore, INEC officials must monitor all campaigns to ascertain that political parties and their aspirants conform to the requirement to politically educate and present their manifestoes to the electorate. The additional value of this recommendation is quality campaigns.

Enforcement of the rule of law is very important. Where electoral offenders are not prosecuted, impunity will reign supreme. According to Kimpact Development Initiative (an election monitoring group), 1542 suspects arrested for aiding violence and attempting to disrupt the 2019 general election were released. The implication is that such act was capable of institutionalizing violence and disenfranchising genuine voters in future elections, as they know they would not be punished (Olorok, 2020). The rule of law has the capacity to sanitize the system. The action taken by the former Akwa Ibom State Resident Electoral Officer - Barrister Mike Igin, in prosecuting some *ad hoc* staff who compromised their role in the 2019 election is commendable. This served as a deterrent to those that had the intention to indulge in rigging the 2020 election

in Edo State, and a morale booster for the voters in the face of past unfulfilled promises from INEC and the security agencies, that the electoral process will be free and fair.

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