
NILDS

Journal of Democratic Studies

Volume 5, No. 2, 2024

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Published by

National Institute for

Legislative & Democratic Studies,

National Assembly,

Abuja.

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Contents

Politics of Inconclusive Election and the Role of Elites in Nigerian Politics:
A Review of Gubernatorial Elections in Northern Nigeria 2019-2023

Yan Idris Gadau & Musa Umar Adam

Framing Green Finance: The Role of Political Advertising and Legislative
Messaging in Nigeria's Sustainable Development Agenda

Etimbuk E. Obot & Mohammed Manzuma-Ndaaba Ndanusa

Assessment of Civil-Police Relations and Conflict in Greater Banjul Area,
the Gambia (2019-2024)

Hassan M. Jarra

Examining the Role of Resource Control and Ethnic Crisis in Benue Killings

Paul Terlumun Bemgba & Ene Vincent-Orugbo

Creating Political Legitimacy: Electoral Democracy Versus Good
Governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic (1999-2023)

Adesina M. ALABI

Democratic Resilience in West Africa: A Comparative Analysis of Governance,
Civil Society, and Public Participation in Nigeria and Burkina Faso

Ishaka Dele & Shuaibu Umaru Yelwa

Nigeria's Long-Term Socio-Economic Development: Exploring
the Agriculture Value Chain Pathway

INAKU, Jacob Sunday & NANDI, Livinus Ature

Book Review:

Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism

Umar Abdullahi

Politics of Inconclusive Election and the Role of Elites in Nigerian Politics: A Review of Gubernatorial Elections in Northern Nigeria 2019-2023

Yau Idris Gadau & Musa Umar Adam¹

Abstract

Election is one of the vital mechanisms that allow citizens to select their representatives who take charge of their leadership. Elections in most contemporary democracies have been a serious dilemma due to the massive irregularities associated with their conduct, which affect the credibility of the election and turn to inconclusive elections. Inconclusive elections in Nigeria became the biggest challenge that has been troubling the Nigerian democratic journey, and it has been used either as a source of winning the election or to disrupt the election process through some illegitimate ways. The study, therefore, examined the role of elites in determining the outcome in favor of the ruling party during the gubernatorial election in Northern Nigeria from 2019-2023. The paper used a qualitative research approach where both primary and secondary data were collected using in-depth interviews with some selected stakeholders as informants, and secondary data were also collected from journals, books, and government documents. The study found that there is a mixed reaction toward the factors that determine the outcome of the gubernatorial election such that the incumbent factor plays a significant role in determining the election outcomes, the study also found that the political elites use all avenues to win the election at all costs using state resources, court litigation and security agency and manipulation to change the election result in favor of their party and candidates. The study recommended that to avoid elite interference in election outcomes, the appointment of the INEC chairman and other positions should be independent of the government, and all other stakeholders should stick to their assigned duties and responsibilities.

Keywords: *Democracy, inconclusive election, elite, Governorship, Northern Nigeria*

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Introduction

Democracy is widely recognized as the best form of government in most parts of the world today (Nnanyelugo & Nwafor 2013). Democratic doctrines and election processes globally guarantee people's sovereignty to choose their representatives at all levels of government and also educate leaders to depend more on bargaining rather than intimidation and force to sustain and maintain their legitimacy. This process has not always been conducted free and fair without some degree of malpractice and violence that ultimately used to generate disagreement between the parties involved (Sule & Sambo, 2020; Samihardj, Murnawan, & Lestar, 2021). Elections all over the globe are usually marred with some degree of malpractice in their conduct. For example, in the 2010 United Kingdom election, 232 electoral malpractice cases were reported by the police, with 216 cases in England, 9 in Scotland, and 7 in Wales, while 25 cases were affirmed in Northern Ireland (Isobel & Johnston, 2017).

Over the years, Nigeria has witnessed, with increasing dismay and fear, its inability to hold free, fair, peaceful, and credible elections with results that are universally acknowledged and respected (Uchechukwu, Uchenna, & Vincent, 2023). These fundamental challenges facing the conduct of the elections have resulted in the cancellation of the election results and declared them inconclusive. As opined by Abiagu & Abada, (2023) that the electoral irregularities that characterized the 2019 elections and the associated violence that followed the irregularities led to a loss of 756 Nigerians in which the northern part of Nigeria maintained its lead as the hotbed of electoral violence with 570 deaths and there was a report of 137 deaths during the recently held 2023 elections. Consequently, this paper aims to study inconclusive elections and the roles of elites between the 2019-2023 governorship elections in Northern Nigeria.

Conceptual Exposition

This section discusses the conceptual exposition that constitutes the subject matter and tries to establish the link between the theoretical frameworks. These concepts include democracy, election, inconclusive election, the influence of elites on election outcomes, and Northern Nigeria.

Democracy

Democracy is a political system that provides frequent constitutional chances for replacing the ruling officials and a social mechanism that allows the greatest possible section of the public to influence significant decisions by choosing among competitors for political office (Babatunde, 2014). The democratic revolution around the world started with the military revolution in Portugal, which overthrew many decades of authoritarianism and generated arguments, but finally successful democratic transition in the country. Furthermore, the third wave of global democratization spread to other countries like Spain and Greece, and later to Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Central and Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 between the mid-1990s, the percentage of democratic countries in the world increased from 27 percent in 1974 to more than 60 percent. These changes show that democracy has become the foremost form of government around the world (Diamond, 2005).

This has successfully led to the moving away from a single-party to a multi-party democratic political system since the 1990s, ending single-party political systems and military dictatorships in some countries like Ethiopia and Eritrea in 1991 and even Mobutu appealed to stepping towards democratization process in 1992, ending Apartheid in 1994, Liberal democratic constitutions of Benin (1990), Mali (1992), South Africa (1994), Ghana (1993), Malawi (1994), Nigeria 3rd and 4th republics (1993 and 1999 respectively), Ethiopia (1995) and Eritrea (1997) has begun to reshape the democratic face of the African countries, (Gebrewold, 2009; Ronke & Devid 2012).

Democracy has gained worldwide recognition. It has grown in popularity since its introduction and is regarded as an absolute requirement for growth and development. There is no commonly acknowledged definition of democracy because, over the years, several versions of democracy have emerged (Babatunde, 2014). The concept of democracy in governance has established a space for the people collectively to manage and protect their interests by making and enforcing their own rules and laws, and this gives people the power to choose their fate (Rochineng, 2017).

Furthermore, democracy came with the idea of election, which is one of the recent practices of democracy and the implementation of elections is fundamentally the people's power to select their leaders. Democracy and elections are two sides of the coin that are meticulously related, the operation of elections, which is the people's desire, characterizes the perpetuation of a democratic system in a country. However, these changes pose enormous challenges in the country's electoral process. The electoral process in these countries can be regarded as the entire election cycle starting from the demarcation of electoral boundaries, registration of voters, candidate nomination, and election campaigns others include setting election time and announcement of election results along with the setting tribunal for resolution of electoral conflicts between associations and other groups (Elekwa & Okechukwu, 2014).

African regional democracies have had difficulties conducting unrestricted, fair, credible, and clear elections since the elections are flawed by serious irregularities, electoral fraud, election-related violence, and inconclusive ballots. This is why most African states fervently desire to key into current technological systems in the conduct of elections to reinforce the quality of the electoral process (Victor, 2018).

Elections

Elections are essential to any liberal democracy and are often used to assess whether or not democracy is progressing (Adewale, 2022). Elections, according to Ejumudo, cited in Victor (2015, pp 2-27), "...are the technical means or instruments of ensuring popular participation in governance by citizens who choose their representatives in conformity with the dictates of modern democracies and the hallmark of legitimacy". Therefore, African countries have had at least four multi-party elections since independence, indicating how democratic institutions in those countries passed the test of endurance. In the 1990s, more than 150 multi-party elections took place in Africa (Teshome, 2008). Elections all over the globe have been associated with some degree of malpractices and manipulations from all ramifications. Elections to fill public offices were first held in 1923. This was because the Clifford constitution, which replaced the Nigerian council, introduced electoral principles that galvanized political activities, especially among the elected

Nigerians (Nnenna & Mohammed, 2020).

Elections in the African continent and Nigeria in particular have been associated with serious irregularities that jeopardize democracy's survival to the point that democratic stability isn't guaranteed (Sule & Sambo, 2020). Since the exception of the democratic regime in Nigeria, the conduct of the election has witnessed dismay, fear, and incapacity to hold free, fair, peaceful, and open elections with results that are universally acknowledged and respected. The challenges associated with the conduct of free, fair, and credible elections around the globe have made various countries adopt technology in their election process to reduce the level of indecency in the conduct of the election process.

The significance of information and communication technology in human society has become an inevitable and fundamental operation and activity of the society (Paul & Omolayo, 2018). This has made information and technology a part of human effort and has been used in every institution of government in different countries. Since independence to the present date election, the country has experienced serious challenges in conducting a free, fair, and credible election that is free from the elite's inference due to the materials benefit attached to the political position in the country and as such the election management reveals a disturbing degree of partiality and gross incompetence in discharge of these sacred duties they were established to perform for Nigeria and inability to effectively manage the conduct and deleterious effects on the nations effort at instituting credible and virile democratic system (Uchechukwu, Uchenna & Vincent, 2023).

Accordingly, the use of technology during the election is a global trend that cuts across different nation-states. Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission has introduced technology in the elections process using Smartcards, which resulted in the improvement of the quality of the elections in the country the use of technology during the elections made it difficult to manipulate electoral figures, citing the transparency of technology as an essential feature in credible elections (Tombari & Kaunert, 2023). The gross wrongdoing concerning the conduct of the election by elites in the county using all avenues at their disposal has led to the cancellation of the election result and declaration of it inconclusive, as witnessed in the election in Ekiti, Ondo, Bayelsa, Kano, among others.

Inconclusive elections

An inconclusive election has been seen as an election that does not decide the winner in the final conduct, the election is said to become inconclusive and this form of election is one out of numerous proportions of badly conducted elections and needs to be carefully addressed otherwise such an election can undermine the success of democratic regime (Mohammed, 2015). During electioneering campaigns, political rallies, and parades in the build-up to the 2015 and 2019 general elections, the political elite from different political parties employed hate speeches and various propaganda tools to project the programs of the parties and their candidates to their supporters while destroying the images of political opponents and inciting their supporters to violence.

The dramatic changes in our lives nowadays have been the prevalent proliferation and use of digital technology, in which information and communication that rely on the internet become tools (Abdulganiyu & Yusuf, 2020). Information and communication technology has been applied to the election process in almost every country around the world. One of the improvements of e-voting is to enhance participation and remedy weaknesses related to old voting techniques and apply e-voting simplifiers, and enable people to make their opinions known and cast their votes, an imperative requisite for a positive democratic process (Ahmada, et al, 2015).

The significance of e-voting has led to the development of card readers in the Nigerian election process, which has greatly improved the election process in the country. However, despite the reshaped and improvement of the election process through the introduction of information and technology in the election process yet it has been met with a lot of challenges, such as inadequate funding, lack of IT specialists, unreliable electricity supply, and a growing level of cybercrime (Ahmada et al, 2015).

The cases of inconclusive elections have been increasing due to the transformation in the electoral process in which technological gadgets were introduced, such as permanent voters' cards and smart card readers, which have been successful in countries like Ghana, Gambia, Sierra Leone, Kenya, Malawi, etc. The long practice

preconception of marking elections a do-or-die affair had made strong political party contenders formate violence to scare away potential voters, which can lead to violence in a bid to win the elections (Eigege, 2016).

Mohammed (2019) argues that two sorts of inconclusive elections occur in Nigeria nowadays, and equally are rooted in the conduct of the election. First, is INEC declared inconclusive election mainly arising from the conduct-of-first-ballot election and is normally followed by electoral violence, the use of political party thugs to scare away voters, carting away of election materials, or arising from electoral misconducts such as the non-use of SCR in some PUs or election has not been held in other places and the second is Tribunal or court declared inconclusive election, which happens when the Tribunal or the Court gives a judgment and declares an election inconclusive.

Similar research conducted by (Nkwede & Emordi, 2020) pointed out Section 26 of the Electoral Act (2010) which believes that an election is scheduled, but there is likely to be a serious breach of the peace INEC should postpone the election and in Sub-Section 26 (2) of the Electoral Act, “there shall be no return for the election until polling has taken place in the area or areas affected.” Sub-Section 4 of Section 26 stipulated that a declaration might be made if the result in the affected areas would not affect the overall outcome of the election. Another reason why an election can be declared “inconclusive” as stipulated in Section 53 (2) of the 2010 Electoral Act is over-voting. When the votes cast at an election in any polling unit exceed the number of registered voters in that polling unit, the result of the election for that polling unit shall be declared void by the Commission. To this end, another election may be conducted on a date to be fixed by the commission, where the result at that polling unit may affect the overall result in the constituency.

From the above two perspectives, a study conducted by Abah & Nwoku, (2020) believes that the series of inconclusive elections recorded over time was the inability of politicians to play by the rules. In a similar study, findings indicated that ballot snatching, destruction of election materials, killing of ad hoc and permanent staff of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the announcement of poll results under duress, the disappearance of the returning officers with election results, over-militarization of the poll, and the issue of the fake military officers are

also found to have been responsible for the inconclusiveness of elections (Babatola et al., 2019).

In a similar study conducted, Ikechukwu (2019) revealed that the increasing spate of inconclusive elections in Nigeria has become more keenly contested by politicians and henceforth re-run elections are inevitable; Inconclusive elections increase because neither erring politicians nor their parties are sanctioned for perpetuating electoral ills that breach the successful conclusion of the electoral process and nothing challenges INEC's capacity to deal with inconclusive elections more than INEC itself.

Declaring an election inconclusive is also informed by other factors such as electoral violence, snatching of electoral materials, over-voting, and non-usage of the Smart Card Reader (SCR) in the conduct of elections as such more than 300 people were reported to have been killed in 2019 general election (Imosemi., et al 2019; Mohammed, 2015). Another research conducted by Chidi and Chukwu (2017) found that the declaration of inconclusive elections arises from a lack of elections in some electoral units; cancellation of election results from some polling or electoral units due to irregularities; serious security breaches in significant areas of the electoral districts, among

Elitism

The involvement of elites in the management of the affairs of Nigeria was achieved through the introduction of the elective principle by the Clifford Constitution of 1922, the then Governor-General of Nigeria (Eziho, 2020). The political elites in Nigeria are a conglomeration of individuals who occupy or have occupied any strategic position in the political, economic, and social institutions of the country. A 'fusion of elites' is visible in Nigeria where elites from different segments, such as traditional and religious leaders, nationalists, bureaucrats, and military, have amalgamated into a new ruling elite, based on state power and elites use their political and economic power and establish their private companies because they are well-placed to gain government contracts and subsidies (Smita, 2022).

Based on the above assertion, the election in the country since independence as an arena of warfare and a struggle to climb up the leadership at various levels of the government. In a study conducted by Olawale, (2021), the political elite uses political party platforms to capture power through an electoral process that is often marred by irregularities and violence, with the belief that this will enable them to engage in primitive accumulation of public wealth. This has indicated that the struggle to win state power and control its resources at all costs is the root of the violence associated with elections in Nigeria. A similar study also indicated that the existence of the elite has not produced any positive outcome for energy and citizens. Party elites use different strategies, including hate speech, to achieve electoral success, which often culminates in pre-electoral violence.

Governorship Election

Governorship elections are a democratic process where individual voters choose a governor who, by law, takes the responsibility of managing the affairs of the particular state for the period stipulated by the constitution. February 2019 marks another year for Nigerians to vote for their next president and the election of the state governors, and all federal and state legislators. The elections were conducted between the major opposition parties of the All Progressives Congress (APC) against the opposition People's Democratic Party (PDP), along with many smaller parties (Page & Tayo, 2018). Moreover, the 2019 General election like any other election conducted in the country was heralded with tension, blame games, anticipated violence, and campaign of calumny, threats, and the desire to win at all costs. Over 70 political parties were registered and about seventy-three (73) parties fielded candidates for the Presidential Election (Sule, 2019).

The governorship elections showed a shift in voter preference in some states compared to the General election in 2019. In Kano State, for example, President Buhari, got 77.5% of the votes, while the APC incumbent governor managed to count less than 9000 more votes (50.23%) than the PDP challenger. In Bauchi State, the incumbent APC governor lost to PDP candidates despite the APC having 77.9% of the votes in the presidential election. In Sokoto State, the PDP candidate won with a minimal margin of 342 votes, whereas the APC candidate

won 56.2% of the votes in the presidential election (Angerbrandt, 2020). Table I.2: below shows the final results of the inconclusive elections conducted in five Northern Nigeria States. In these states, the factors that call for the declaration of inconclusive elections differ. In Plateau state, the total number of voters cancelled was more than the difference in the number of voters of the two major candidates. In Bauchi state, the margin between the winner and competing candidates was less than the total number of votes cancelled in some polling units. In the case of Adamawa, Kano, and Sokoto the total number of cancellations was higher than the margin of lead votes between the two leading candidates (Mohammed, 2010).

Table 1.1: Indicated the State Where Inconclusive Election Occurs

States	Total Registered Votes	APC	PDP	Margin	Cancelled
Plateau	2,480,455	583,255	538,326	49,377	44,929
Bauchi	2,462,843	465,453	469,512	4059	45,312
Adamawa	1,973,083	334,996	367,471	32,475	40,988
Kano	5,457,747	987,819	1,041,576	26,655	128,572
Sokoto	1,903,166	486,145	489,558	3,413	75,403

Source: *Author's compilation*

Table 1.1 above indicates the first round of the election where the inconclusive election occurred in which the margin of votes exceeded the margin between the two top major aspirants of the APC and PDP leading to the declaration of the election inconclusive by the INEC citing the electoral act that whenever the total number of the cancelled votes exceeds the number of votes margins the election must be declared inconclusive and the commission must fix another date for the re-run election to complete the process.

Table 1.2: The Final Results of the Inconclusive Elections in Five Northern Nigerian States in the 2019 Gubernatorial Election

States	APC	PDP	Margin	Cancelled Votes	Final Result	Final Result	Wining
					APC	PDP	
ADAMAWA	334,996	367,471	32,475	40,988	336,386	376,552	PDP
BAUCHI	465,453	469,512	4,059	45,312	500,625	515,113	PDP
KANO	987,819	1,041,576	26,655	128,572	1,033,695	1,024,713	APC
PLATEAU	583,255	538,326	529,400	49,377	595,582	546,813	APC
SOKOTO	486,145	489,558	3,413	75,403	511,611	512,002	PDP

Source: *Mohammed (2019; IRI/NDI)*

Table 1.2 above also indicates the final election results after the first round, which led to the cancellation of the election result by the INEC, referencing the electoral act, the election showing the winner after the re-run election, in which the PDP won in three states, while the APC goes in two states.

Theoretical Framework

This paper utilized classical elite theory propounded by Gaetano Masca, (1939). The elite theory opined in every existing society, the majority of the existing economic resources, intellectual, and cultural are in the hands of a small group of individuals who use them to exercise power over the rest of the population (Mariotti, 2020). Influence of power always flows from the elites at the top downwards to the masses, through elite-biased public policy. For the elite to defend their interest against the masses, the instruments used include coercion through the military, police, or militia groups; manipulation and domination through all forms of education, and media (Dantoro, 2009). The relevance of the theory to the election process in Nigerian political dispensation is that the political leaders and elite use to manipulate the election process to win the election at all costs through different mechanisms using security agencies colliding with the election management staff and other stakeholders who are responsible for being part in the election exercise.

Methodology

The paper used a qualitative method of data collection where the data were obtained from both primary and secondary sources. Concerning the primary data, in-depth interviews were conducted with some selected informants from INEC, political parties, security agencies, and the Judiciary. The secondary sources of the data were based on published material such as journals, articles, newspapers, and government reports.

Data Presentation and the Discussion of the Major Findings

This section presents the data collected and the discussion of the major findings of the paper. The data collected are from the interviews generated from the field with all the selected informants for this paper.

Accordingly, Nigeria's election has featured unprecedented manipulations and violence, which make it a do-or-die affair. This trend makes the electoral system challenged whenever an election is conducted in the country, from within and outside the country where the election has been manipulated. Since the return of the democratic dispensation in 1999, the election conducted every four years has progressively put the election umpire into a questionable position where both local and international observers blame the commission for giving special treatment in favor of the party in power and its candidate in the elections.

Two major themes were developed to guide the paper, including "Electoral Fraud and Political Influence using state resources."

Electoral fraud and political influence have been considered as one of the most key aspects that creating political disorder in the Nigerian political development process, since the rebirth of the democratic journey in 1999 to the present day all the elections being conducted in Nigeria have been challenged with a full allegation of electoral fraud and political influence towards the outcomes of the elections.

During the conduct of this study, the informants gave divergent views on the outcome of the 2019 gubernatorial election. The responses of the informants on

one hand suggested that the government used all the avenues at its disposal to manipulate the election outcome in the affected state, which led to the inconclusive election in 2019. It is against the above assertion that the study conducted by Casimir, Omeh, and Ike, (2013) viewed electoral fraud as an illegal interference with the process of an election and Acts of fraud affect vote counts to bring about an election result, whether by increasing the vote share of the favored candidate, depressing the vote share of the rival candidates, or both. During an interview based on the above themes:

Key informants II & III opined that:

“The political elites in power have a hand in determining the outcome of the election in many states during the 2019 gubernatorial election in Kano and Plateau because the government in power uses different sorts of electoral fraud to directly or indirectly controls most stakeholders like security operatives and indirectly uses the electoral commission to create delays and inconsistency to manipulates the outcome of the elections”

Another Key informant added that:

“The incumbent factors play significant roles in determining the outcome of the election because many stakeholders are loyal to the government even those that were under the federal government agencies, political elites used their power within it to influence the outcome of the election as seen in the Kano and Sokoto state 2019 gubernatorial elections were thugs and violence were perpetuated to course changes in the results”

The responses of the informants from various stakeholders have indicated that the incumbent factors have positively influenced the outcome of the election in two states, Kano and Plateau states. At the same time, the key informant also lamented that incumbent factors did not play a significant role in determining the outcome

of the election in the state of Bauchi state. The responses of the informant above indicated a similar study conducted by Obiagu et al. (2019) that in Nigeria, the inconclusive election had become a new political instrument for incumbents to keep power or ensure that their favored candidates obtain it by any means necessary. This was obvious in the Imo governorship election in 2011, when the incumbent governor used the inconclusive arrangement to postpone the declaration of poll results while unsuccessfully attempting to influence the outcome of the race. The technique, however, worked in the state during the 2015 gubernatorial election, when the incumbent governor used it to keep power. In another study conducted by Terrence (2021) that in some other places the uses Cross River as a reference point to indicate how the politicians use all avenues of widespread violence before, during, and after the election in all three senatorial districts, which resulted in house destruction, political assassinations, politically motivated kidnappings, ballot box stealing and result manipulation and related irregularities to influence the election outcome.

The responses from all the interviews confirmed that the incumbent had in one way or the other affected the outcome of the elections conducted in their respective states, except Bauchi state, where the government in power lost the election to the opposition candidates. Smita (2022) posits that after the introduction of multiparty elections, power did not concentrate in the hands of the president, but power got decentralized to other positions. Yet, the elites took charge of these power positions and utilized them in a way to establish a wider and overlapping system that was corrupt at its foundation. This reflects how the state that got rich resources as a gift of nature, which it could utilize to develop its conditions, has become a curse (Mohammed, 2021). The state, instead of establishing an inclusive development model, turned out as an extractive and exclusionary institution that extracts resources but the benefits are never equitably distributed in the society and are utilized by a few called elites. Pareto, rightly, states in his work (*The Mind and Society*, 1935) that the circulation of the elite is a constant process in which the power shifts from the governing elite to the non-governing elite, and this power is never held by the masses, which is practically visible in a Nigerian context.

The second theme developed during the conduct of the interview was the “frequent use of state resources by the political elites.”

Every election needs resources to accomplish on the part of the commission and the political parties, and their candidates in all the activities. Candidates and political parties the uses of state resources during the election, particularly the incumbent powers, cannot be overemphasized in the current nature of the Nigerian democratic dispensation. Concerning the current study, the state resources are under the control of the state governors, and during the election, state resources have been used for political campaigns and have served as tools for gaining more support due to their material strength.

Informants III assessed that:

“The incumbent uses the state’s resources to finance the political party and their candidates and also to collide with the other stakeholders to influence the election outcome as witnessed in the 2019 gubernatorial election in Kano where the then government in power uses the state resources to buy votes and some part of the security agency to intimidate voters and create serious political unrest that will affect the outcome of the final election”

This assertion is in line with the research conducted by Amobi and Uchechukwu (2016) posits that the government in power uses state resources to finance elections or to support their candidacy during the election. The same views were captured by local media tagging Amechi the former River state gubernatorial and APC campaign director of Buhari’s 2015 presidential campaign as he praised single-handedly raised the funding of governorship campaigns of at least five APC governors, including that of the former speaker, Governor Aminu Tambuwal of Sokoto State and separately, Amaechi is accused of diverting £140 million of state funds into Buhari’s presidential campaign, with reports he paid for media, consultants and private jets.

In an interview conducted on the uses of resources, the informants lamented.

During the interview, informants I & III lamented that:

“The incumbent didn’t play any role in the outcome of the Bauchi state inconclusive election because the incumbent government, Mohammed Abdullahi Abubakar of APC, lost to the Bala Mohammed Abdulkadir of the opposition PDP new government. This shows you that the incumbent factors were not the reference point for winning or losing the election as far as the Bauchi state election is concerned.”

Another key informant I also added that:

“As per as Bauchi state is concerned, the government in power hasn’t influenced the outcome of the election because during the gubernatorial election in 2019, the government in power lost to the opposition, which indicated that the security agencies were on neutral ground to save the voters and election material to have free elections away from violence”.

The response of the above informant has indicated that inconclusive elections were attributed to the violation of the electoral provisions hence section 26(1) of the Electorate Act says that an inconclusive election is said to have occurred when the date of the election has been appointed and there is every possibility of breach of peace due to natural disasters or any other emergencies the commission may postpone the election and shall, in respect of the area, or areas concerned appoint another date for the holding of the postponed election.

It is also therefore specified in section 47 (3) of the electoral Act which states that where a smart card reader or any other technological device deployed for the accreditation of voters fails to function in any unit and a fresh card reader or technological device is not deployed, the election in that unit shall be canceled and

another election shall be scheduled within 24 hours if the Commission is satisfied that the result of the election in that polling unit will substantially affect the final result of the whole election and the declaration of a winner in the constituency concerned (Electoral Act, 2020).

The paper found that an inconclusive election has multifarious factors attached to it; on one hand, it resulted from a serious breach of electoral regulation by some stakeholders. The paper found that an inconclusive election was the product of the desperation of politicians to manipulate the election process in their favor; weak organizational and administrative management of elections by the electoral body, and inadequacies with the legal framework of the election (Mohammed, 2019). The political elites use security agencies also to rig the election in favor of their political candidacy or to win the election at all costs as witnessed in the study conducted by (Ndubuisi, 2020) that the election in Ondo state clearly stated that the security forces were deliberately deployed to scuttle the election process for the love candidates to the election at all costs. This has also become a serious problem in Nigerian polity as many people spoke out against the pattern, but the government continued to hold on position in deploying massive military personnel during elections, even though the elections are turning into a form of warfare (Olaniyan & Babatunde, 2015).

Other fundamental issues that have been considered serious challenges in which course inconclusive elections were the weak institutional and organizational arrangements when it comes to preparation for the conduct of the election in Nigeria, the election materials normally arrive at the polling units late, and the election starts and ends. The central problem that will make the election questionable is for the election management body to delay the election process to hold on to the exact time stipulated in the Electoral Act and Constitution.

Conclusion

Inconclusive elections in Nigeria have been one of the major impediments to the Nigerian electoral process, which has continued to feature in the Nigerian electoral process, particularly since the reversal of the democratic dispensation in 1999.

Each election conducted in the country inconclusive election continue to continuing to disrupt the smooth running of the election. From 2019 to date, the country has experienced an influx of occurrences of inconclusive elections, which have affected the credibility of the electoral institutions responsible for managing the elections in the country. However, this paper examined the politics of inconclusive elections and the role of elites in Nigeria: a review of governorship elections in northern Nigeria 2019-2023, it was found that the paper observed that inconclusive elections became serious challenges to the success of the democratic journey in Nigeria because the causes of the inconclusive has been the sources of serious concern which demand total restructuring of the electoral process. Inconclusive elections became tools used by the political elites to win the election or disrupt the election process and benefit from the re-run election.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made for the Nigerian government, INEC, and future researchers:

- Firstly, the Nigerian government should devote to continuous training, retraining, and capacity building of INEC officials to enhance their proficiency in utilizing technology in the electoral process. This would improve the efficiency of election management and minimize errors and irregularities.
- Secondly, the appointment of the INEC chairman and other related stakeholders in the election process should not be directly from the political office holders, which, in turn, will directly influence the election outcomes
- Thirdly, the government should also allocate sufficient funds for the procurement and maintenance of up-to-date technological infrastructure to support the electoral process, which ensures the reliability and security of these systems and is essential to building public trust in the electoral system.
- Fourthly, the government must strengthen the legal framework and election

guidelines governing elections to address issues related to inconclusiveness.

- Fifthly, INEC and the political parties should enhance transparency and accountability in discharging their stated responsibility concerning the electoral process by providing regular updates and detailed information on electoral guidelines and rules that everyone should adhere to have an election free from any interference. Improving communication with stakeholders can help enhance the credibility of INEC and foster trust among the electorate.
- Sixthly, they must also engage in outreach programs and civic education initiatives to educate the political leaders and the public about the importance of non-interference in the electoral process, and how their actions contribute to inconclusive election outcomes. Empowering voters with knowledge can lead to greater participation and confidence in the electoral system.

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