



Electoral Processes and The Uncouthly Behavioral Pattern of Members of the Political-Class and Electoral Institutions: A Bleak Future for Democracy In Nigeria

Ajobiewe Jamiu Olatunji & Victor Edwin Asuquo

Centre for General Studies
Ogun State Institute of Technology
Igbesa, Ogun State, Nigeria.

E-mails: tunjiajobiewe@gmail.com; victoredwinasuquo@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

A jealously guided and guarded electoral process adorned with textbook integrity is a critically acclaimed instrument of democracy adopted in installing the government of a structural frame. This is obviously predicated on the fact that the integrity of the process establishes the legitimacy of the government in power. The controversies and irregularities trailing electoral processes as informed by the uncouthly behavioral patterns of the political-class and electoral institutions over several dispensations in Nigeria only dent her global political reputation and gravely threatens the dividends of liberality. Therefore, this paper is critical on the absence of the integrity factor in electoral processes in Nigeria, which systematically espouses that most installed governments lack the legitimacy identity; and the absence of this paramount factor has serious consequences on the acclaimed democratic practices in Nigeria with strong tendencies of destroying the nucleus of democracy in the future. The absence of the integrity factor in Nigeria's electoral processes has become a reoccurring decima, which constituted a major factor that broke the backs of democracy in the 1960s and paved the way for the emergence of military juntas and a bloody civil war. A major political crackdown is looming and members of the political-class and electoral institutions are still goofing. Playing the ostrich does not look promising as a major political crackdown would sweep across the entire landscape, leaving no stone unturned. It is therefore expedient for these political actors to be sensitive to the dark clouds hovering over Nigeria's political space and decipher the handwriting on the wall; otherwise, democracy already looks bleak and it is threatened into extinction; and with this threatened extinction comes another episode of a collapsed system to join the league of failed States in Africa. This research adopted a simple historical and contemporary data gathering and qualitative analysis method.

Keywords: Democracy, Integrity, legitimacy, liberality, crackdown, bleak

Journal Reference Format:

Ajobiewe, J.O & Asuquo, V.E (2023); Electoral Processes and The Uncouthly Behavioral Pattern of Members of the Political-Class and Electoral Institutions: A Bleak Future for Democracy In Nigeria. *Humanities, Management, Arts, Education & the Social Sciences Journal*. Vol. 11. No. 3, Pp 27-34. www.isteams.net/humanitiesjournal. [dx.doi.org/10.22624/AIMS/HUMANITIES/V11N3P2](https://doi.org/10.22624/AIMS/HUMANITIES/V11N3P2)

1. INTRODUCTION

Liberal democracy is predicated on the luxury of freewill. The concept of liberality attached to it is an essential robust element that makes for a free society and a popular institution of government. Makinda (1996) posits that, generally, democracy can be seen as a way of government firmly rooted in the belief that people in any society should be free to determine their own political, economic, social,



and cultural systems. The entirety of the idea hinges on freewill with a wide coverage across the political landscape of a country to be weighty enough to establish confidence in the system. This unequivocally resonates the position of Berouk (2008) when he espoused that the concept of democracy is used to describe a political system designed to widen the participation of ordinary citizens in government.

The legitimate government of a structural frame is installed through the instrumentality of elections. Election is an instrument of liberal democracy marshalled in the spirit of rule of law to establish a platform for a healthy and clean contest amongst political parties as primarily regulated by a set of governing principles or statutes promulgated by an electoral institution. Anglin (1998) could not agree any less in his postulations espousing that election is the founding pillars of any democratic political system, whether considered fragile or established and that it can simply be taken as the most critical and visible means through which all citizens can peacefully choose or remove their leaders. This goes to underscore the fact that election is the critically acclaimed corridor that connects the seat of power; any political party that desires to assume the seat of power ought to engage in a healthy contest grossly monitored by electoral rules promulgated and monitored by unbiased electoral officials.

It is quite obvious as established in the political character recorded in most Sub-Saharan political climates that clinching power is the ultimate goal of most political parties, irrespective of the process. This is what Adejumobi (2000) has to say about the wanton disregard for electoral integrity and fairness:

...African elections are, in simple terms, window-dressing rituals with no real political meaning other than the stuffing of the ballot boxes behind closed doors. They are just administrative formalities which have become standard signs of good conduct adopted by African governments to Western states and international institutions on which they are financially and politically dependent

The cumulative effect of such reoccurring decima is what Berouk (2008) describes as thus:

...a political uncertainty and the sharpening of ethnic politics which will, in turn, inspire the widespread disillusionment of Africa's citizens who will be forced to rethink that the solution to prevailing problems cannot be found within the framework of democracy.

Andrew and Diana (2019) challenge this ugly hallmark by advocating that when political leaders are chosen by democratic means, the electoral process supposedly legitimates their authority; and more importantly he further espoused that perceived electoral integrity should remain roughly constant in a highly competitive political environment. This goes to underscore the that the integrity of an electoral process establishes the legitimacy of the installed government; therefore, the degree of legitimacy heavily hinges on the degree of the integrity of the electoral process. The disregard for the integrity of the process has become the pitfall for democracy in Africa.



The disregard for the integrity of electoral process has become a weight or milestone responsible for the sinking or dwindling political experiences in Africa; and the sooner this factor is adequately addressed, the better the political experiences in Africa. But if ignored, the future of democracy looks bleak; and a bleak future for democracy indicates a collapse that could drastically reduce Africa to a league of failed States.

Following the controversial death of Gen. Sani Abacha, the last leader of military junta in Nigeria (Gen. Abdulsalam initiated and led a transition to democracy), democracy supposedly returned to her structural frame. The emergence of the fourth republic in 1999 raised hopes for a more brilliant political experiences and temporarily eliminated the dark clouds portraying a bleak political future for democracy in Nigeria. Now, from 1999 till date, the infant democracy that was birthed by the emergence of the fourth republic is expected to have gained a level of admirable maturity, being exposed to the operations of flowering and promising democracies in other political climes and the superfluous dividends of liberality.

The fabulous dividends and glorious tendencies exposed by the operations of liberal democracy especially in the Industrialized North, naturally should outweigh the greedy maneuverings and wrangling of an anti-democratic oligarchy constituted by a rogue of political-class in Nigeria. But through dubious manifestoes and aggressive methods, the rogue political-class has always demonstrated brazen impunity in obviously manipulated electoral processes in partnership with the electoral institutions and imposing its selfish political architecture on the poor majority.

2. ELECTORAL PROCEDURAL ANTECEDENCE AND POLITICAL PATTERN IN NIGERIA

The 1922 Clifford Constitution could be recorded to have graciously bequeathed the Nigerian political architecture with a brilliant clause under the auspices of the “Elective principle”, which created a platform for electoral activities and future political development. This colonial initiative was so magnanimous that by the following year, 1923, the first political party, Nigerian National Democratic Part (NNDP) came into existence. It is of utmost importance to espouse that although colonial initiatives and institutions are usually accompanied by overwhelming suspiciousness by anti-colonial crusaders and African intellectuals, it is what colonized people choose to do with colonial initiatives that determine if colonial intensions materialize or are suspended. The franchise or suffrage, which was in the words of Duverger (1966) classically timocratic (limited) in nature at the time of initiation, graciously created opportunities for people’s participation to a small extent. The British colonialist may not have been so generous, but what the Nigerian political-class did with that initiative only exposed their political inclinations and orientation.

It is almost quick to readily judge colonial legacies as being responsible for the political crackdowns that have ruined the leverages that should have birthed brilliant political realities and experiences in Africa. It is like the case of a girlchild accusing her mother of witchcraft for her failed marital ordeals, but bluntly refuses to do a sincere appraisal of the character demonstrated in marriage. The uncouthly character adopted by members of the Nigerian political-class and electoral institutions hold the Nigerian political anatomy in the jugular, threatening to sniff life and to paralyze the system.



This is not some recent development, but an agelong undemocratic habit against international best practices in all ramifications. It is a behavioral pattern that seriously threatens the continuity of the Nigerian project.

The period between 1963 and 1965 was a crucial and determining political window in the history of Nigeria, which was to design the electoral architecture that would spearhead electoral activities thereafter. Undoubtedly the period under review reveals a pioneering electoral attitude that has reverberated through several dispensations and registered a de facto electoral pattern resonating very unpleasant consequential rhythms. Unknown to the political actors at the time, the uncouthly political character displayed with brazen impunity was going to set a dangerous precedential hallmark for political wrangling in Nigeria.

The fallout of the 1963 Census crisis could be recorded to have ruined or bittered the existing partnership that created the Coalition Government between the Tafawa Balewa led Northern People's Congress (NPC) and the Nnandi Azikiwe led National Council of Nigeria Citizens (NCNC) at the federal level. In preparations for the 1964 Federal elections, both political parties in the coalition that had gone sour resorted to shenanigans to thwart their political relevance and ambitions.

History is replete with the fact that the NCNC turned to the Action Group (AG), Northern progressive Front (NPF), Kano's People's Party (KPP) and Zamfara Commoners Party (ZCP) to forge an alliance christened **UNITED PROGRESSIVE GRAND ALLIANCE** (UPGA) against the **NIGERIAN NATIONAL ALLIANCE** (NNA) forged by the Northern People's Congress (NPC), Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), Dynamic Party (DP), Republican Party (RP) and a few other political organizations. (See <http://africanelections.tripod.com/ng>)

Two major alliances had been formed ahead of the 1964 federal elections and both political institutions appeared aggressively determined to ruin the chances of the other and clinch power by all means. Emmanuel (2012) in his attempt to portray the degree of rivalry between both alliances espoused that the arrowheads of both alliances (NPC and NCNC), being members of the coalition that assumed the seat of power unashamedly proved this aggressive disposition by utilizing the power of incumbency to the fullest. He went further in espousing that the NNA, being the anchor of the coalition, indulged in arresting, detaining and jailing some members of the UPGA. The instrument of State power was so utilized that the NNA even deliberately prevented some candidates of the UPGA from filing nomination papers and dastardly declared a number of its candidates unopposed; even though there were available UPGA candidates for those positions. (See <http://africanelections.tripod.com/ng>).

Some dailies such as the **Nigerian Daily Times** and the **Nigerian Citizen and Daily Express** published a few articles resonating some of the unpleasant political realities at the time. For instance, there was an article that featured the constituency of the Prime Minister, Tafawa Balewa, where one Azi Nyanko, a candidate of UPGA filed a suit, claiming he was prevented from filing his nomination paper. According to the article, in a ruling delivered by one Justice Nigel Reel on April 3rd, 1965, the case was dismissed on the grounds that it was inspired by malice. This was a clear demonstration of the utilization of the instrument of State power through political strings from the corridors of power controlling a puppet judiciary for political gains.



Members of the UPGA did not stand aloof as the NNA unleashed arson and terror through the instrumentality of State power; the UPGA members also adopted several retaliatory measures to commensurate whatever its alliance members were meted with, especially in UPGA strongholds such as the western and mid-western regions. As a matter of fact, the West African Pilot of 9th, October, 1964 reported the assassinations of two local prominent NNDP members, Prince Adepoju Odufanade and Fakunmoju in the western region, apparently by AG thugs. The Nigerian Citizen and Daily Express published the lamentation of Alhaji Aminu Kano of the NEPU and a member of the UPGA, where he mentioned that members of the NEPU were mercilessly beaten by thugs from the ruling party, compelling them to join the NNA otherwise face a series of more fierce brutality. He further lamented that there were about 200 members of the NEPU languishing in prison in Sokoto on several pretexts and thousands of UMBC members wailing in prison in the Tiv Division.

Election rigging, state-sponsored thuggery, arson, political assassinations, political vendetta and all kinds of terror became the pioneering hallmark of the Nigerian electoral practices with strong precedential consequences as other electoral processes in subsequent political dispensations followed suit. The 1965 western region elections were accompanied by another round of brutality and fatality; so intense that there were about two thousand casualties recorded. The unruly and uncouthly behavior of members of the political-class precipitated that unbearable restive situation in the western region, which eventually became the last weight that broke the backs of democracy in Nigeria and opened up the era of military juntas and an eventual bloody civil war.

The military juntas and the circle of bloodbath that marked a horrible watershed in the history of Nigeria ordinarily should have engraved lasting lessons on the political tabloids of the country; but following the resumption of democracy in 1999, members of the unrepentant political-class readily put on the very filthy undemocratic apparel and resumed treading the inglorious path that put off the light of liberal democracy in Nigeria. The electoral processes did not and has not shown signs of tilting to the glorious path of electoral practices adorned with textbook integrity.

3. THE BEHAVIOUR OF ELECTORAL INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA

Pastor (1999) describes the determinant role played by institutions in electoral processes when he opined that whether an election is a source of peaceful change or a cause of serious instability, mainly depends on the character, competence and composition of a number of institutions; and Berouk (2008) pointedly mentions that the most important institution is the electoral commission, which is the permanently functioning institution charged with the task of preparing and conducting elections. Goodwin-Gill (1994) crowns it by postulating that institutions such as the electoral commission ought to be independent, competent and perceived as completely fair by all the candidates and parties participating in the electoral process.

The behavior of members of the electoral institutions in Nigeria systematically makes them accomplices of the political disasters recorded in most dispensations. Pastor (1999) identifies a lacuna that could explain the situation by positing that in Africa's nascent and fragile democracies, electoral institutions are usually not properly insulated from the political pressure and control of political forces, especially the ruling party which has special interests in the outcome of elections.



This is absolutely true of the charade displayed by electoral institutions in Nigeria. Prevailing examples are the electoral institutions that supervised or monitored the western region elections in 1965, headed by Eyo Esua and the incumbent INEC headed by Prof. Yakubu Mahmud. After a jamboree of open flouting and violations of electoral rules, the Commission declared the Samuel Akintola led NNDP as winner of the elections. This was the same election that prominently featured assassinations, arsons, destruction of properties and the about two thousand casualties that called in the first military junta in 1966, yet the Commission went ahead to declare a winner. One would be tempted to ask questions such as: Are evil vices such as killing, rigging, intimidations, bloodletting and ballot box snatching allowed within the ambit of electoral laws? Are these the parameters for electoral practices bequeathed on Nigeria by the proponents of democracy? Are members of electoral institutions always looking away and pretending not to know these vices are the hallmark of electoral activities? Otherwise, how does an electoral institution declare a winner in the face of literal bloodletting battle among political parties?

It could be recorded that in an open letter published in Daily Times of 23rd November, 1965, the Chairman of the Electoral Commission, Eyo Esua, said that the loyalty of the region's commissioners tilted in favour of the NNDP and that his commission was utterly helpless. He further claimed that some of his electoral officers refused to accept nomination papers of certain candidates and that there was genuine cause for misgivings about the authenticity of the results and that because of the foregoing, the elections should be nullified. It is of utmost importance to mention that this revelation by Eyo, the Commission's Chairman came forty days after the conclusion of the elections and results signed and handed over to the Governor of the western region. A number of questions would naturally suffice: one would want to ask if Eyo was under pressure from the UPGA camp to nullify the results of the election; or could it be that his conscience pricked him so hard that he had to make those confessional statements.

But be that as it may, the forty-day interval between his famous speech and the conclusion of the elections superfluously defeated the too-late integrity he was trying to put forth.

The undemocratic role played by the electoral institution in 1965 set a dangerous precedence that is trailing and influencing the behavior of subsequent electoral institutions in Nigeria. For instance, in the just concluded 2023 Presidential elections in Nigeria, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was involved in a colossal misgiving. The brazen disregard for the provisions of the constitution on the parameters for declaring a candidate winner of a Presidential election, is not just unbearable but a major pitfall for democracy in Nigeria.



Chapter 6. Part 1. Section 134 indicates thus:

- (2) A candidate for an election to the office of President shall be deemed to have been duly elected where, there being more than two candidates for the election-
- (a) he has the highest number of votes cast at the election;
 - and
 - (b) he has not less than one-quarter of the votes cast at the election each of at least two-thirds of all the States in the Federation and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.
- (Derived from the 1999 Constitution)

The elections result published by INEC portrayed that Bola Ahmed Tinubu of the All Progressive's Congress (APC) won in most of the states of the federation, but did not achieve 25% of the votes in the FCT; yet INEC went ahead in declaring him winner of the presidential elections. In the spirit of fairness and objectivity without contradictions and an iota of political biasness, what INEC did was a brazen disregard for the provisions of the constitution; and as such played down on the supreme status it bears on all matters.

It is expedient to succinctly mention at this juncture that every other law whether primary or secondary not aligned with the provisions of the constitution does not hold waters because the supremacy of the constitution is expected to be unalloyedly adhered to. This exposition becomes necessary in case INEC has some unannounced provisions for electoral conduct not in tandem with the above extracted provisions concerning the parameters for declaring a candidate winner in a Presidential election. The supreme provisions are crystal clear on the subject matter. For INEC to have tactically bypassed these provisions to declare a candidate that did not achieve the FCT requirement is a display of breach of trust reposed on the electoral institution.

This uncouthly and highly uncivilly behavior by INEC almost readily makes for a political dejavu; a replay of the undemocratic behavior showcased by the Electoral Commission headed by Eyo Esua in 1965 and widens the lacuna for structural imbalance in the political system of Nigeria. The Chairman of INEC, Prof. Yakubu Mahmod, being a professor of Nigerian history with wealth of empirical and theoretical knowledge, especially being very conversant with the wrangling in the 1964 and 1965 elections and the ugly aftermath recorded, is expected to understand the volatility surrounding elections and the unprecedented devastation and catastrophe that could accompany detected acts of manipulations in the process. To have blatantly declared a winner despite the weight of irregularities witnessed and recorded in the process simply portrays an adumbration of the plight of Eyo Esua's Commission, that INEC was helplessly inclined to a particular political party; and this is politically unhealthy.



4. WEAPONIZATION OF ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

Election is one of the ornaments that beautifies democracy. The integrity of the process is the springboard that helps democracy reach its crescendo and attract accolades and global recognition. So, in all ramifications, election enhances democracy and the integrity of the process is its engineering prowess. But the uncouthly behavior of the political-class has given that instrument of democracy an awkward identity, owing to the manhandling of that virtue; therefore, making it look like an enemy of democracy.

Election has literally been weaponized by members of the political-class and members of electoral institutions as accomplices as it has become the source of political woes for the nation and the people therein. The arsons, assassinations, state-sponsored thuggery, intimidations have drastically reduced election empathy and as a matter of fact made the electorates lose confidence in it. It is so bad that some electorates deliberately bypass or boycott elections to avoid or avert some of the woes recorded during electioneering racket.

It appears every election period is labeled parasitic and a bloodletting window characterized by unwarranted death, intimidations and destruction of lives and properties. It has become a weapon in the hands of politicians with which they bring deception, untold hardship and unfulfilled promises as they impose their unpopular ideology on innocent electorates. The absence of the integrity factor in the electoral processes in Nigeria has destroyed trust and confidence in elections. Tyler (2013) is of the opinion that long-term democratic stability requires that citizens believe their elections are conducted fairly. There are hundreds, perhaps thousands of eligible electorates who would rather sit back home than go out to cast their votes. The utilization of the instrument of state apparatus in massive rigging worsens the matter as electorates almost readily believe that their votes do not count. It would take a repentant political-class and electoral institutions to rejuvenate the dying virtue of election in Nigeria.

5. THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

Andew and Diana (2019) believe that a lack of faith in elections is a lack of faith in the most fundamental of democratic principles. The 1964 Federal elections and 1965 Western region elections, which were the first major post-independence elections in Nigeria signaled a bad omen through blood and death. That dangerous precedence trailed most of the elections in subsequent political dispensations. Brandishing of lethal weapons, guns cladding, ballot-box snatching, assassinations, state sponsored thuggery, harassment of opposition members and manipulations of elections results defy the very ideology behind this beautiful instrument of democracy. The unchecked embezzlement and high-profile fondling with the treasury have been adduced as the nucleus or motivation behind the stampeding to power character of the Nigerian polity.



The literal stampeding to power politics does not only bring blood and death, but a bleak future for democracy. If the future is bleak for democracy, then cracks are already visible on the sustaining structures; and these cracks are signs of an eventual collapse. A collapse is going to mean a failed State that brings to nought the sacrifices of the founding fathers and heroes that staked all for the birthing and continuity of the Nigerian project.

6. CONCLUSION

Elections heat up the polity and the desperation to win by members of the political-class aided by the uncouthly behavior of members of electoral institutions negatively electrifies the political landscape. The proponents of democracy did not design elections to come with these political radiations, tensions and destructions. The idea is to establish transparency and accountability in forging a government for a structural frame. It is a simple and friendly process in the spirit of sportsmanship; and this simple approach guided by patriotism and the pursuit of nationhood would almost effortlessly adorn electoral processes in Nigeria with the integrity factor that establishes the legitimacy of the government in power.

REFERENCES

1. Makinda, S. (1996). Democracy and Multiparty Politics in Africa. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 34(4) pg. 555–573.
2. Berouk, M. (2008). Democracy, Elections & Political Parties: A conceptual overview with special emphasis on Africa. Institute for Security Studies (ISS) Paper 166. Pg. 1
3. Anglin, D. (1998). International Election Monitoring: The African Experience. *African Affairs*, 97(389):471–495.
4. Adejumobi, S. (2000). Elections in Africa: A Fading Shadow of Democracy? *International Political Science Review*, 21(1):59–73.
5. Berouk, M. (1998)
6. Andrew, M., D. & Diana, C., M. (2019). The Dynamics of Electoral Integrity: A Three-Election Panel Study. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 83, No. 1. pp. 46–67
7. Duverger, M. (1966). The Idea of Politics. In: *The Uses of Power in Society*. London Methuen and Co. pp. 89.
8. <http://africanelections.tripod.com/ng>
9. Emmanuel, O., O. (2012). Leadership Crises and Political Instability in Nigeria, 1964-1966: The Personalities, The Parties and The Policies. *Global Advanced Research Journal of History, Political Science and International Relations*. Vol 1(1) pp. 6-17.
10. Nigerian Daily Times of 4th of April, 1965
11. Nigerian Citizen and Daily Express of 4th April, 1965
12. West African Pilot of 9th, October, 1964
13. Nigerian Citizen and Daily Express of 4th April, 1965
14. Nigerian Daily Times of 23rd of November, 1965
15. Pastor, R. (1999). A Brief History of Electoral Commissions. In: Schedler, A., Diamond, L., and Plattner, M. (eds), *The Self-Restraining State: Power and Accountability In New Democracies*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner.



16. Berouk, M. (1998)
17. Goodwin-Gill, G. (1994). Free And Fair Elections. Geneva: Inter-Parliamentary Union.
18. Pastor, R. (1999)
19. Nigerian Daily Times of 4th of April, 1965
20. Chapter 6. Part 1. Section 134, 1999 Constitution
21. Tyler, T. (2013). Achieving Peaceful Regime Change: Why Do Losers Consent? Working Paper. Derived from:
https://law.yale.edu/system/files/documents/pdf/sela/SELA13_Tyler_CV_Eng_20130321.pdf
22. Andrew, M., D. & Diana, C., M. (2019)