

Elitism, Election, and Governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. A Study of Rivers State, 2003-2019

Ogele, Eziho Promise
Department of Political Science
Rivers State University, Nkpolu Oroworukwo
Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

Abstract

Indeed, an election is central to determining the allocation of values in modern democratic societies. Political parties provide platforms for candidates to contest an election. Sadly, political power has been sustained through the use of violence as experienced in Nigeria's First Republic. At present, party politics is no longer a zero-sum game. To retain a power base, politicians recruit and train youths for political violence. This internal contradiction inherent in Nigeria's democratic system led to the collapse of the First, Second Republic, and the aborted Third Republic in Nigeria. The Fourth Republic came with great expectations, especially among the hoi polloi, who were displeased with the military administrations in Rivers State and Nigeria at large. Unfortunately, the period under view experienced a desperate desire to win at all cost and control democratic government. Electoral disparities have increased the emergence of leaders who are not accountable to the electorates. Despite the amount of petrodollar revenue accrued to Rivers State annually, the power competition among the ruling elites has not allowed for meaningful development in Rivers-state. The principal argument is the contradiction inherent in the structural linkage between power elites and their errand boys, and its implications on good governance in Nigeria using Rivers State as a case. The paper aims at unravelling why electoral integrity was unachievable from 2003-2019 and its adverse impact on good governance. This paper adopted the Clientelist theory in explaining the phenomenon. The paper recommends that electoral institutions receive their salaries and other funds from consolidated funds to avoid undue external interference.

Keywords: *clientelism, election, elitism, governance, insecurity, violence*

INTRODUCTION

Election integrity is a central feature of modern democracy. Qualified citizens exercise their franchise by making their choice through electoral polls without imposition, molestation, inducement, violence, among others. Electoral integrity commences from voter's registration to the point where the declaration of results and acceptance of the announced results by other candidates. "In theory, the employment of elections to select leader sought to provide a nonviolent alternative to the use of force to adjudicate between rival claims to rule, and it ought to be a mechanism that allows citizens greater say over how they are governed"(Birch, Daxecker and Ho'glund,2020,p.3). The above assumption has been proven wrong, particularly in developing societies where democratic rule is still evolving and political actors are desperate to hold onto powers or win at all cost. There is no doubt that the lack of a level playing field for all the candidates has contributed to electoral dishonesty in every election cycle. These are predicated on fact that political class manipulates the electoral system through unethical means and render the process unacceptable to the populace.

Historically, the phenomenon is not new in political development in Nigeria. In the early stage of the colonial era, there were no political parties, but what was in existence were

political associations and unions that usually sprang up simultaneously to protest against exploitative legislative policies of the colonial administration, especially in taxation and land acquisition. Anikpo (1985, p.43) noted that “the first of such associations, the People’s Union, was formed in 1908 to protest against the increase in rate to finance a new water scheme in Lagos. Soon after the First World War, a more articulated protest movement began in Lagos in demand of self-determination.”

The elective principle was introduced in Nigeria by Sir Hume Clifford Constitution in 1922 to accommodate a small group of British educated Nigerian elites in the administration of their country. The development marked the beginning of the elite’s political leadership recruitment in Nigeria, which bereft the involvement of the masses. The struggle for self-determination through nationalist movements in Nigeria was all-inclusive. The educated elites used the Nigerian masses in various protests against the imperialist, especially the worker’s unions. The turning point was during the creation of three regions in Nigeria, which equally led to the regional-based political parties such as the AG, NCNC, and NPC.

The regionalization of Nigeria led to inter/ intra ethnic or sectional political development, which brought about the fierce competition for power that led to the emergence of electoral dishonesty among the political elites in Nigeria. Babalola (2007, p.9) disclosed that “corruption and what is [known] as money politics became manifest during the period when the Electoral College System of voting was adopted in Nigeria. Final colleges were responsible for the election of persons in the House of Assembly. Candidates and their supporters bribed their final college members to influence the pattern of voting.”

At the transfer of power from the imperialist to educated elites in Nigeria, the masses who participated actively in the nationalist struggle were no longer needed. Political power became everything. Hence, electoral dishonesty became a weapon for unpopular candidates and political parties. These electoral anomalies contributed to the collapse of the First and Second Republic. In whatever way, the masses who were used as clients during the agitations by the elites are the worst victims of the effects of electoral manipulations.

Electoral processes in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic has experience electoral violence, electoral malpractice, vote-selling, and buying, among others. The attempts by the incumbent to consolidate their power base intimidate and undermine perceived political opponents, including development projects allocation. Ake (1996, p.7) noted that:

The [power struggle] was so absorbing that everything else, including development, was marginalized. Those who were out of power constantly worried about their exposure to every kind of assault by a state that was hardly subject to any constitutional or institutional restraints. Since what mattered in this type of politics was the calculus of power, the out-of-power elites strove constantly to put together a credible force to challenge those in power, or, at any rate, to limit their vulnerability to harassments and abuse.

Recently, the level of electoral dishonesty in Rivers State has become a burning issue. The political competition among the political elites in every election cycle has made Rivers State a flashpoint before, during, and after elections since the 2003 general election. Almost all the result of elections held from 2003 - 2019 went to the Electoral Tribunal. Some of which ended in the Supreme Court, including issues from the party primaries. The elected officer’s use their first year for court cases. The last year is set aside for preparing for the next election. For instance, after the 2015 general election, one of the challenges was where the Electoral Tribunal will seat to entertain electoral petitions, the contending political parties approached

the court, the Supreme Court upheld the judgment of the Court of Appeal that “It is necessary to protect members of the panel by relocating them from the theatre of war where their lives will be secured” (Ikhilae, 2015, p.2). Similarly, the 2019 gubernatorial election in Rivers State recorded a higher degree of electoral dishonesty and electoral violence at various centers.

The internal contradiction inherent in the political dynamics is opposed to electoral integrity. The electorates are deceived that electoral votes count, it remains an illusion of the political class. Thus, from the party primaries to the declaration of election results are not only predetermined by the state patrons, but also centrifugal forces. To consolidate state power, the godfathers facilitate the electoral process that is abysmal to good governance. The system produced mediocre as State House of Assembly members who are ordinary rubber-stamps - a mere assemblage of cacophonous clients controlled by the buccaneers of the state resources. The transparency, accountability, and participation as well as social equity and the rule of law, which are beacons of good governance, are mystified. The major oversight functions of the legislative arm are reduced to mere political ceremonies. Corruption became entrenched in the State. Hence, development is forgone at the altar of political competition over who controls state resources among the political class at the detriment of the hoi polloi. Therefore, the paper interrogates why electoral integrity was unachievable from 2003-2019 and its effects on good governance. The paper recommends that electoral laws should be amended to ensure that the electoral institution is paid from consolidated funds to avoid undue external interference from the incumbents.

Conceptual Review

Elitism

Elitism is a political doctrine that varies in forms and has been used widely to describe those who vested or occupy positions with powers within the society. Odubajo and Alabi (2014, p.123) argued that “the emergence of elitism is rooted in a capitalism - an ideology that promotes class distinctions in societies.” They buttressed that “most fundamental image of elitism is that which throws to the fore the salient relationship between politics and economics, and nowhere else is this fact celebrated than in the writings of both the classical and contemporary elite theorists. It is a creation of the political-economy dynamics of any society, derived through the very political dynamics and abilities that drive any social formation” (Odubajo & Alabi, 2014, p.125). Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923) and Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941) who propounded the theory of elitism defined elites as those that occupy the highest stratum within a society. The stratum is composed of individuals who are known for outstanding accomplishment and are seen as leaders in a given field of competence. The governing elites are those who play a considerable role in government. They hold specific political offices such as the president, ministers, legislators, secretaries, among others. Pareto argued that aristocracy inevitably decays, producing division and dissension within its rank. When this happens, new elites emerge from old classes to give leadership to the change. Mosca in his thesis wrote that all human societies are ruled by controlling social classes, which are always divided between the rulers and the ruled. Mosca maintained that irrespective of the form of government, power is concentrated in hands of few minorities who form the ruling class.

Election

An election is an official decision-making process by which individuals or groups of people chooses an individual or individuals to hold public office. An election is a core or basis for a democratic foundation. The concept of democracy is designed for the broad participation of ordinary citizens in government through periodic elections, which is an indication that power

resides with people. Makinda (1996, p.557) opines that “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.” Over time, the political elites in Africa and other third world countries have undermined electoral integrity, which has increased the level of mistrust between the rule and the ruled. In studying African politics, Joseph (1999, p.11) cited in (Mesfin, 2008, p.2) buttressed that:

In Africa, the prime purpose of elections will remain the legitimation of whatever regime that currently holds governmental power ... [and] are far from being autonomous operations: they reflect the character of the political order and especially the degree of risk incumbents are willing to tolerate.

Political actors in Africa use violence to further their electoral goals. Scholars have carried out previous studies on electoral violence. They argued that electoral violence is carried out by political actors to influence the process and outcome of elections, and it involves coercive acts against humans and properties (Ogele, 2020, Harish & Toha, 2019; Bekoe, 2012; Ho`glund, 2009). This is common in every part of the electoral cycle ranging from the voter’s registration, party primaries, electioneering campaigns, an announcement of election result (Seeberg, Wahman & Skaaning, 2018). The violence can be promoted by state and non-state actors (Taylor, Pevehouse & Straus, 2017). Generally, electoral violence is viewed from the elite’s competition for political powers. Political elites employ various instruments to influence the election outcome (Birch, 2020; Daxecker, Di Salvatore & Ruggeri, 2019; Mares & Young, 2016; Schedler, 2002). Though, electoral violence encompasses wide manifestations and an outcome, however, the concept is predicated on the coercive component. Birch, Daxecker and Ho`glund presented comprehensive detail of what constitutes electoral violence. They assert that:

Electoral violence is typically selected from among available tools to achieve electoral ends, even if the use of force may simultaneously deliver on other goals, as when land is forcibly taken from a political opponent to reward a political ally. The goals of violence generally include political exclusion, be it exclusion from candidacy (via attacks on candidates); from campaigning (via attacks on or obstruction of campaign events); from the provision of electoral information (via attack son media outlets, election observers, and NGOs involved in voter education); from electoral participation and free electoral choice (via the intimidation, coercion, and/or the displacement of voters); from electoral victory (via attacks on polling stations and poll workers or the destruction of polling materials); or from power (via post-electoral protests contesting the outcome of the election) (Birch, Daxecker and Ho`glund,2020,p.6).

Good Governance

The concept of governance has been widely used by scholars, technocrats, particularly in development literature. A huge related literature focuses on measures and assessments of the quality of governance in specific countries and cross-nationally (Thomas, 2010; Apaza, 2009; Arndt and Oman, 2006; Knack, 2006). Hence, Keefer (2009,p.439) noted that “there is no agreed definition of governance that would provide a convenient device for organizing the literature.” United Nations Development Programmes (UNDP) (1997,p.2-3) defined governance as “the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country’s affairs at all levels’, which ‘comprises mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences.” The Organization for Economic Co-

operation and Development (OECD) defined governance as “the use of political authority and exercise of control in a society concerning the management of its resources for social and economic development, ‘which ‘encompasses the role of public authorities in establishing the environment in which economic operators function and in determining the distribution of benefits as well as the nature of the relationship between the ruler and the ruled” (OECD 1995,p. 14). How such powers are exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources is crucial. That is the form of political regime; the process by which authority is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources for development; and the capacity of governments to design, formulate, and implement policies and discharge functions (World Bank 1994, p. xiv). Though, the World Bank definition has been operationalized as Worldwide Governance Indicator (WGI) project in terms of six aggregate indicators. They include (1) voice and accountability (‘the extent to which a country’s citizens can participate in selecting their government, as well as freedom of expression, freedom of association, and free media’); (2) political stability and the absence of violence; (3) government effectiveness; (4) regulatory quality; (5) the rule of law; and (6) control of corruption (World Bank 2007,p. 2). Good governance ensures that corruption is reduced to minimum. The minority views or voices are put into consideration or account before a wide range of decisions that might affect them is taken.

Theoretical framework

The paper adopted clientelist theory as its theoretical construct. Clientelism is an ambiguous concept “at the crossroads of politics and administration, economy and society” (Roniger, 2004, p. 354). Darabont (2010) used clientelism as a framework to explain the political economy of leadership and governance. It explains vote-buying, electoral manipulation, rewarding opposite politicians, among others. Clientelism was a recent theory developed in the 20th century used in explaining political corruption and the electoral process globally. Its origin is traced to the Greek language, which denotes to obey and patronize (Morse, Mazzuca, and Nichter, 2010). Political clientelism is a form of electoral mobilization. It is a political bargain that deals with” proffering of material goods in return for electoral support, where the criterion of distribution that the patron uses is simple” (Stokes, 2011, p. 649). Graham (1997) characterized clientelism as:

An action-set built upon the principle of "take there, give here," enabling clients and patrons to benefit from mutual support as they play parallel to each other at different levels of political, social, and administrative articulation.

Political clientelism is anchored on the transaction logic of “the distribution of resources (or the promise of) by political office holders or political candidates in exchange for political support, primarily - although not exclusively - in the form of the vote” (Gay, 1990, p. 648). It “involves asymmetric but mutually beneficial relationships of power and exchange, a non-universalistic quid pro quo between individuals, or groups of unequal standing” (Roniger, 2004, pp. 353 &354). Nevertheless, access to resources is “conditioned on subordination, compliance or dependence on the goodwill of others. Those in control patrons, sub patrons and brokers-provide selective access to goods and opportunities and place themselves or their supporters in positions from which they can divert resources and services in their favour” (Roniger, 2004, p.354). In the Clientelism theory, the relations between the patron and client are spelt out. “Their partners-clients-are expected to return their benefactors' help, politically and otherwise, by working for them at election times or boosting their patron's prestige and reputation” (Roniger, 2004, p.354). Hence, Scott (1972, p.92) defines a patron-client relationship as:

A special case of a dyadic (two-person) ties involving a largely instrumental friendship in which an individual of higher socioeconomic status (patron) uses his influence and resources to provide protection or benefits, or both, for a person of lower status (client) who, for his part, reciprocates by offering general support and assistance, including personal services, to the patron.

In a democratic experiment, especially in developing countries, Clientelism has evolved into a more complex exchange network of client-broker-patron, which has adversely impacted governance in Nigeria. Egobueze and Nweke (2016, p.6) noted that:

In Nigeria...youths openly served as political thugs to key political figures and *godfathers*. In a rational society, it will be taboo to publicly be declared as a political thug or a merchant of violence... The elites in power who see themselves as *godfathers* wish to retain political power at all costs. Political power is used as a means of achieving economic wealth. To achieve their inordinate interests, these politicians and political powerhouse manipulate the youths from seeing them as their means of survival. These elites pauperize the youths, apply the carrot diplomacy, and arm-twist them to seeing acclaimed *godfathers* as the only means of succour and survival. In a survivalist mission, the youths ingloriously yield to their pressure. The youths are then, armed with dangerous weapons to prosecute the elections in their favour.

Consequently, this phenomenon leads to a struggle for power resulting in perpetual electoral violence in every electoral cycle in Rivers State since 2003. Hence, Stocks (2011, p. 67) observed that “clientelism is harmful to democracy as it slows economic development, strangulates democracy, institutes dictatorship and abuse of political offices as well as entrenches massive political corruption.” Linking the theory to this study, Ogundiya (2009) noted that, “Nigerian state is a client and prebendal politics where elites acquire power at all cost for personal wealth accumulation using their client in a patron-client relationship during elections.”

The emergence of the elite-dominated party politics in Nigeria

Until 1900, the landmass is known today as Nigeria existed as several independent and sometimes hostile states with linguistic and cultural differences. The power politics were localized in the various emirates, kingdom, chiefdom, which had established political systems before the emergence of British rule in present-day Nigeria. However, to achieve their economic objective, the British government represented by the Governor-General, Sir Lord Lugard introduced an indirect rule in the country. Utuk (1975, p.1) noted that:

Nigeria was the home of the classical system of Indirect Rule, which Sir Fredrick (later Lord) Lugard, the father of that system, stamped upon a society widely different in kind, size and culture. The system was the only immediate means through which these different groups of peoples were saved from dictatorial systems of government.

Subsequently, the colonist was confronted with challenges on how to administer the colony with less stress. Hence, the establishment of the indirect rule to cater for the limited European personnel and funds to administer the colony. The desire to fill this gap led to the recruitment of elites and foremen who were educated and trained as technical, supervisory staff, and skilled labour (artisans) that will be responsible for minor challenges. Ake (1981, p.72) noted that:

Education was perhaps the single most important factor contributing to the creation of a petit-bourgeoisie in indigenous colonial society. Colonial educational policies reflected the typical contradictions of colonialism. And yet there were also good reasons for educating Africans. You cannot fully

dominate without educating, without penetrating the personality and culture of the person to be dominated. And the penetration has to be accomplished not so much by coercion as by education.

For the imperialist, colonial education was necessary for the realization of a cultural and political atmosphere favourable to ensure the continuous domination of the colonial system. Anikpo (1985, p.42) disclosed that:

They need to articulate their economic interests gave rise to the imposition of a new political structure sustained on the administrative framework of the civil service. Thus the eclipse of the traditional social institutions became total, superseded by a new model of organization that eventually monetized the traditional economy; a new political structure based on the Westminster type of parliamentary democracy, and a new social order based on Christian religious ethics and Europeanized 'school' education.

The colonist achieved the creation of a new social order through the manipulation of the system to suit their economic interest. It was not long, the educated elites became conscious of the segregation in the country and also got interested in participating in the affairs of the country at the decision making level in the country. This was very simple to the colonist having gotten indoctrinated educated elites who will always represent their interest. Arikpo (1967, p.156) noted that:

In 1920, some Nigerian lawyers, doctors, and merchants from Lagos and Calabar participated in a conference held in Accra, Gold Coast (Ghana) by a body known as the National Congress of British West Africa. The purpose of the conference was, in the words of its Chairman, 'not to organize an anti-government movement, but to help the work of the government loyal and constitutionally.

The involvement of the Nigerian elites in the management of the affairs in the country was achieved through the introduction of the elective principle by Sir Hume Clifford Constitution of 1922. The Governor-General of Nigeria, Sir Hume Clifford (1920-31) was concerned about how to manage the country at the beginning of his administration. This challenge led to Sir Clifford describing Nigeria as a "collection of independent native states, separated from one another... by great distances, by differences of history and traditions and by ethnological, racial, tribal, political, social and religious barriers" (Nigerian Council Debate, 1922). The elective principle gave rise to the emergence of party politics. The first political party was the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP). The NNDP was formed in 1923 by Herbert Macaulay, the grandson of Bishop Ajayi Crowther. The party won three seats in Lagos and Calabar in the Legislative Council. It is imperative to note that the elective requirement disenfranchised many Nigerians from participating in that election such as having the minimum annual income of £100. This was the emergence of elite politics in Nigeria. Anikpo (1985, p.44) noted that:

The aristocratic posture of the NNDP was alienating to the younger radical elements of the Lagos community. In 1934, this new group of educated and radical younger men formed their association called the Lagos Youth Movement (NYM) [which later became Nigeria Youth Movement (NYM)]. Nnamdi Azikiwe was one of its members.

However, in 1941, Nnamdi Azikiwe resigned from NYM because of the internal contradiction inherent in the organization. He joined Herbert Macaulay in NNDP. "The party succeeded in rallying massive support for the national crusade for self-determination, and in 1944, it initiated the formation of a broader-based party, the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC). Macaulay was elected National President and Azikiwe became the

Secretary-General” (Anikpo, 1985, p.44). The NCNC had branches all over the country and agitation for self-determination was its main objective. This gave rise to the emergence of the new Governor-General Sir Arthur Richard Constitution of 1945. The 1945 Constitution divided the country into three regions. Subsequently, regional/ethnic-based political parties were formed - the NCNC (east); the Action Group (AG) (west); and the Nigerian People’s Congress (NPC)(north). The power struggle among the elites became more pronounced after the formation of these parties. Anikpo (1985, p.45) noted that “Nigerian leaders’ individual self-ambitions in the turmoil that gave rise to the formation of the ethnic-based parties in Nigerian politics.” There was a contestation of power among these elites. In 1947, late chief Obafemi Awolowo in his book titled, Path to Nigeria freedom stated that:

Nigeria is not a nation; it is a mere geographical expression. There are no “Nigerians” in the same sense as there are “English” or “Welsh” or “French”.

The word Nigeria is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not (Ekpu, 2017).

Akin to Chief Obafemi Awolowo’s assertion in 1948, Sir Arthur Richard regrettably said that “it is only the accident of British suzerainty which had made Nigeria one country. It is still far from being one country or one nation socially or even economically... socially and politically there are deep differences between the major tribal groups” (Ekpu, 2017).

Electoral integrity in Nigeria

The legitimacy of an election largely is expressed in the electoral process starting from the point of voter registration of the declaration of a successful candidate. If the electorates and candidates perceive that an election was manipulated or fraudulent and administered poorly, they may refuse to accept the outcome. Most time, it breeds public dissatisfaction or disinterest and sometimes leads to violence or instability in the country. This was attributed to the collapse of the First Republic in Nigeria after protracted violence in the formal western region. Hence, the government makes provision for electoral tribunals where aggrieved candidates sought redress if they perceived abnormalities in the electoral process.

Electoral dishonesty is not novel in the political development in Nigeria. A. Nwoke, a candidate for the Eastern House of Assembly in 1953 narrated his observations at the meeting of a final electoral college as follows:

On the morning of the election, some leaders of the clan or agents would wear special large over-flowing natives robes with specially designed large pockets. These pockets would be filled with folded currency notes and time carrier (sic) rolled luxuriously into the polling station. He would take a stand directly opposite the voters but on the other side of the fence which was built to keep off intruders. He would greet him by shaking one of the folded notes in his hands and bidding him goodbye and naming the candidate, would ask him to call out the next on his bench. That process was repeated until the whole people were met and instructed. (Sklar, 1963 cited in Babalola, 2007, p.9)

In 1960, political powers were transferred to the educated elites in Nigeria. The management of the democratic government was vested in them. However, the political culture acquired during the colonial era remains. But there were changes in dealing with the masses that were used independence struggle. Ake (1985, p.11) noted that:

At independence, the nationalist movement, the bourgeoisie revolution, had to change its character. For in power the nationalist leaders would be the new butt of mass discontent and the class character of their politics would be revealed starkly. They had to deracialize the masses and at the same time, try to conceal contradictions. There was hardly any other way available for doing this except

appeal to ethnicity. Ethnicity would smother class consciousness among the masses and allow a vertical integration of leaders and the masses across class lines.

The 1964 election was the first general election conducted by the National Electoral Commission. The election was to define the intra-power relation among the political class and the masses. Sadly, the election was characterized by electoral irregularities, especially in the Western region. There was unprecedented electoral violence before and after the election. The power tussle between Obafemi Awolowo led Action Group and Samuel Akintola led Northern People's Congress (NPC) was what triggered the electoral violence. This led to the collapse of the First Republic.

The political actors of the Second Republic were the same people who participated in the colonial era to the demise of the first republic, except those that were killed during the 1966 Coup. The electoral dishonesty of the Second Republic was not different from the 1964 general election experience. In the Second Republic, the election was massively rigged, worse than the First Republic. Abe (2008, p.170 cited in Ogele, 2013, p.41) vividly captured the violence in the federal election of 1983 when he poignantly asserted that "during the federal election of 1983, violence was promoted to an unimaginable level where states sponsored thugs, arsonists and assassins unrestrainedly unleashed terror and fear on both opponents and voters alike."

One of the reasons deduced by General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida for aborting the Third Republic in June 1993 was an alleged subversion of the electoral process through bribing of voters (Obadare, 1999 cited in Ogele, 2013, p.42). The Fourth Republic is not different from the pattern of electoral dishonesty demonstrated in the previous Republics. The Fourth Republic is fraught with compromised electoral officers, use of thugs, the assassination of a political opponent, ballot stuffing, hijacking of electoral materials, electoral violence, among others. For instance, the late President Yar'Adua admitted that the 2007 election that brought him to power was marred by electoral fraud, hence constituted an electoral reform committee headed by Justice Uwais (rtd).

The political class, electoral integrity and good governance in Rivers State

Rivers State is endowed with natural resources (oil and gas) which eventually became the mainstay of the Nigerian economy. The implication is that the state is very strategic to the central government economically, hence, the level of external influence is very pronounced despite the quasi-federal system. The oil exploration and exploitation attracted lots of Multinational Oil Companies to the state, making it one of the richest in the country in terms of its human and natural resources.

Most of those who participated in the quest for autonomous regions became the new political class in the state. Although the theory of elitism posited that there is constant recruitment of young elites to replace the new ones. This is achieved through political apprenticeship to sustain control over the system. Over the years, these apprentices grew into political patrons and dominated the political space, especially in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Sadly, the electoral process has been grossly violated to the point that Rivers State is considered as a flashpoint in every election cycle since 2003. Preparing for elections in the Rivers State is akin to preparing for war. President Olusegun Obasanjo was quoted as expressing worries that the:

The total absence of any control over spending by candidates and parties towards elections. I have said that we prepare for the elections as if we are going to war, and I can state without hesitation, drawing from my previous

life, that the parties and candidates together spent during the last elections, more than would have been needed to fight a successful war (cited in Smah, 2008, p.74).

The funds made available for executing elections from the party primaries to the general elections are used for various reasons both positive and negative. Positively, the funds are used for party logistics such as buying or hiring buses for rallies, media campaign, venue decoration, entertainments, shirts and caps, party agents, among others. Negatively, the funds are expended on the hiring of thugs, renting or buying of guns and other weapons, paying mercenaries as thugs, bribing electoral officials and security agencies, vote-buying, among others. Ake (1978, p.71) noted that:

Using violence to expropriate other members of the ruling class increases the level of insecurity with this class for everyone, including the hegemonic faction. This sets in motion a vicious circle of extremism and political violence. Insecurity makes political actors struggle even grimmer and tenaciously for political power and the high premium on political power inclines political actors to use any methods which will produce desired results rather than confine to methods of competition that are moral or legal.

Political violence was relatively unbeknown in Rivers State in the Second and the Aborted Third Republics respectively. The commencement of the Fourth Republic 1999 general election was relatively peaceful, although recorded relatively limited electoral irregularities in some parts of the state, but with low scale violence. However, the transition election in 2003 was characterized by unprecedented electoral irregularities, high intensity of political violence, including assassinations of political gladiators in the state. Shaxson (2007, p.200) noted that:

It was ahead of the next election in 2003, once civilian politics were properly embedded, what matters began to run out of control. In the run-up to those elections, Peter Odili, the wealthy and flamboyant governor of Rivers State and one [of] President Obasanjo's strongest supporter, employed Asari to intimidate opponents. Asari eventually split with Odili, and his men fought a bloody battle with the Niger Delta Vigilante, another militia led by the feared warlord Ateke Tom.

The 2015 general elections recorded high death tolls and destruction of properties. Almost all the twenty-three local government areas of Rivers State had one electoral disparity issue or the other. Ebiri (2015) disclosed that:

There were incidents of sporadic gunshots in Buguma in Asari Local Government Area and the burning of houses in Bera in the Gokana Local Government Area of the State...unknown gunmen opened fire at a vehicle convening security men around the Whimpy area of Obio-Akpor, killing one of the security personnel on the spot... A young man has also stabbed to death during a fracas between All Progressives Congress and Peoples Democratic Party supporters at Kpite in Tai Local Government Area during the accreditation exercise...A soldier shot dead a voter at Oghale-Eleme in Ward 3, Unit 002 in Local Government Area following a heated disagreement at one of the polling units. Mr Chris was killed because he refused INEC materials to be hijacked by political thugs. In Ozuoha in Ikwerre Local Government Area, one person was allegedly killed and another inflicted with a machete cut. In Buguma, there was an incident of sporadic gunshots which enabled the gunmen to hijack electoral materials meant for Ward 4, 5, and 6. At Bera in

Gokana Local Government Area, irate youths torched the resident of a PDP chieftain and destroyed several cars.

Security agents were not spared in the violence. In the 2016 rerun of the National Assembly election, SaharaReporters (2016) reported that:

The most brutal incident occurred (during Saturday's rerun) at Ujju community near Omoku in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni LGA of Rivers State, where a police patrol team was ambushed. In the ambush, 10 policemen scampered into the bush. The Mobile Police organized a rescue mission. Regrettably, the team discovered that DSP Alkali Mohammed of Mobile Police Unit 48 was beheaded along with his orderly. The patrol vehicle was taken away with weapons. Three policemen escaped. Five were missing in action.

There were counter claims by the two major political parties (APC and PDP) over the number of deaths recorded in the 2015 general elections. The Rivers State All Progressives Congress claimed that their members have become endangered species. "The committee released a list of 32 party members it claimed had been killed by a variety of methods—several were beheaded, others clubbed to death and one man burned alive. The PDP has denied responsibility for the killings, blaming them on "satanic cult clashes," guilty of "reckless and false allegations" aimed at destabilizing the state government" (Gaffey, 2016).

The 2019 gubernatorial election became the worst among them because of electoral disparity. The democratic process was flagrantly abused ranging from disobedient of various court orders to the Gubernatorial/House of Assembly elections that stayed up to 30 days before the results were finally announced. "On March 10th, 2019, the Commission suspended all electoral processes in Rivers State has determined that there was the widespread disruption of collation of results of the elections conducted on March 9th 2019. Subsequently, the commission set up a fact-finding committee to assess the situation and report back within 48 hours" (Olokor, 2019). The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) disclosed "that collation centres were invaded by some soldiers and armed gangs resulting in the intimidation and unlawful arrest of election officials thereby disrupting the collation process" (Olokor, 2019). The 2019 elections in Rivers State was an abuse of the international best practice of conducting a free and fair election in democratic societies. There was widespread rigging, over-voting, thugs, death, illegal arrest, disagreements among security agencies who became an accomplice in the criminal enterprise, weakness of the electoral umpire, among others. There were several accusations among the political parties, both ad hoc and permanent electoral officials, among others.

The patron-client approach to the election has become more pronounced in political development in Rivers State and Nigeria at large. The rent-seeking politicians have uncontrollable access to state funds meant for development. The state funds are used in maintaining their political structure (boys) who are used for unethical democratic activities. This development affects electoral integrity because it creates fears among the electorates leading to political apathy in Rivers State. The politicians recruit some of these thugs for self-defense because of the fierce nature of political competition in the Rivers State. Ake (1996, p.7) argued that "political power became everything; it was not only the access to wealth but also the means of security and the only guarantor of the general well-being."

The Rivers State House of Assembly has been a product of the patron-client relationship since the emergence of Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The House of Assembly finds it relatively

difficult to oversight the executive led by their patrons. For decades, the House of Assembly has not relatively questioned the executive arm on abuse of public office, particularly on account of maladministration. There is relatively no transparency or political accountability in the state. The judicial arm was not left out; however, it became an appendage of the executive arm. For instance, the competition among the political class led to the closure of the Rivers State judiciary for over one year from 2014-2015. The state was without a chief judge; hence, nobody was to assign cases to judges. The inmates were without trial, they remained in prison custody until when courts were re-opened. The rule of law was eroded in Rivers State. The rights of citizens were violated as there was no court to seek redress. Sadly, the police stations became quasi-court rooms where matters were adjudicated, and the Divisional Police Officer or Commissioner of Police became Judges. The state gradually drifted to anarchy.

The process of emergence of the political officer is key to good governance in modern democratic societies. Election integrity makes the elected public officials accountable and transparent in their dealings, especially with the electorates believing that in the next election cycle, they will be appealing for their votes. Public officers ensure that the government is all-inclusive through the participation of the citizens in the state. However, what is obtainable in Nigeria's Fourth Republic is selective governance and participation, which have become an issue of concern to the citizens. For instance, most Town Hall meetings which ought to be a forum where citizens should air their view concerning governance are arranged and organized in such a manner that opposing voices are not accommodated. Sadly, the fourth realms have compromised their voluntary obligation, hence, no active opposition or critic of the government. Even the public hearings of the House of Assembly are mere ceremonies because the outcomes are already predetermined. The power elites frustrated the fourth realm to reduce the level of checks. Hence, the masses became vulnerable to the ruling elites. They neither conduct proper elections nor allow votes to count, but *carry go* syndrome was established. *Carry go* is a nomenclature in the electoral process that allows no opposition in Nigeria, particularly in general elections. By implication, the elections were predetermined by the power elites. Therefore, it is baseless to participate in that election since winners are already known. The internal party elections of major political parties were mere ceremonies. The candidates are handpicked from their party congresses to their primary elections. The state is run as a criminal enterprise of few power elites. The consequence of this scenario leads to bad governance, which invariably increased the degree of underdevelopment in the state despite huge resources in the state.

The political system in Rivers State was structured to disallow dissenting voice(s). The political elites sustained this political structure through the creation of insecurity in the state. Politics became the only profitable venture. Hence, poverty was inevitable. The political elites used poverty as a weapon of political control; thereby promoting anarchy since the relevant security agencies were compromised. The abuse of human rights became rampant; the culprits were guaranteed protection from been persecuted by the relevant authorities. Political intimidations and death tolls increased in the state creating panic all over. The ruling party and their oppositions traded blames and accuse each other of masterminding the killings in the state. Sadly, every successive administration either inherits this nefarious structure or creates its own. To sustain this competition, the party in government increased security votes, which are not accountable to the detriment of infrastructural development. Hence, the Rivers State residents suffered from state-sponsored terrorism. The former Secretary of Defense of the United State of America, Robert S McNamara asserted that:

In a modernizing society, security means development...Security is development. Without development, there can be no security. A developing nation that does not develop simply cannot remain "secure." It cannot remain secure for the intractable reason that its citizenry cannot shed its human nature. Without internal development of at least a minimal degree, order and stability are simply not possible. They are not possible because human nature cannot be frustrated beyond intrinsic limits. It reacts because it must (McNamara, 1966, p.7).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Elitism, election, and governance in democratic development in Rivers State cannot be overemphasized. The elective principle of the Clifford Constitution of 1922 demonstrated that money is the wheels of politics. Hence, the political atmosphere in Nigeria favours the power elites against the electorates in the process of choosing political officeholders. The electoral process has been distorted in Rivers State and Nigeria at large by the ruling political elites. The patron-client relationship is being sustained through continuous expropriation of state resources. This relationship ensures effective control of the political system even when they are out of office. However, to sustain this political control, the international best practice on the conduct of free and fair elections has been compromised by the Election Management Board. Their syndicates are positioned in the electoral empire through federal character (quota system) and all other organizations relevant to the execution of elections in Nigeria. The incumbent spends the first year in the office attending to tribunal cases. Hence, the paper recommends that the electoral empire should be paid from consolidated funds to avoid undue external interference from the incumbents and godfathers. Second, the nomination of the INEC commissioners should not be in collaboration with the chief executive of the state. Third, there should be regular redeployment exercise of electoral officers and monitoring of their financial transactions. Fourth, the civil society organizations should be strengthened for regular engagements with the electorates on electoral related matters – workshops and seminars. Finally, the government should establish a special court to handle electoral related matters.

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