

Winning the Game or Consolidating Democracy? A Critique of the Edo 2020 Gubernatorial Election in Nigeria

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Abstract

The literature on democratization prioritizes election as a major prerequisite because election gives legitimacy to government. The study examines the nexus between election and democratic consolidation with focus on the 2020 Edo state governorship election as an analytical tool. The study was set out to investigate the role of election in the consolidation of democracy, issues that characterized the conduct of election in Nigeria vis-à-vis the Edo state election. It explores the quality and legitimacy of elections. Furthermore, the elite theory was applied to explain why Nigeria is yet to consolidate her democratic experience despite periodic elections. The qualitative method was employed. The major findings of the study reveals that the monetization of votes, harassment of voters, observers and journalist by political parties and the character of the political class are issues that has impede elections in Nigeria. In conclusion, the study therefore recommends that the merchandizing of votes be criminalized, civil societies should carryout aggressive campaign at the grassroots on the dangers of selling their vote, INEC should organize a symposium for party representative to be sent to the field as well as look into an upgrade of the SCRs. Finally, issues that pertain to electoral offence should not be trivialized.

Key Words: Election, Democratic consolidation, Edo 2020, Nigeria, Elitism

Introduction

Free, fair, credible and transparent elections are the hallmark of representative democracy. The stability, growth and development of democratic societies to a large extent depend on election. Hence election is a critical aspect of democracy. Since Nigeria's political independence, efforts have been made to institute and sustain civilian governments based on her experience of many years of autocracy. These efforts, however, more or less ended in the rotation of civilian governments with military regimes. It is not surprising, therefore, that the military has virtually appropriated twenty-nine years of fifty-nine years of self-rule. This has resulted in colossal abuse of fundamental human rights and widespread incidence of misrule.

Electoral democracy has not been quite successful in Nigeria; the democratic process is, in fact drenched with characteristics that make some think calling it democracy could be contradictory. In democratic states, the outcome of elections is dependent on the quality and character of the ruling class. Thus, training of the incumbent also plays a huge role on how liberalization of the political system is accepted, guided and sustained by the gladiators. The Nigerian ruling class over the years has acquired a peculiar character which has made election a "take it by all and any means" (Abokwara, 2016). For some, politics has become a career rather than a call to service hence power must be safeguarded by all means.

As Mark (2015) hold that the pursuit to win election by all measures has led to loss of lives of some members of the voting public and some popular aspirants by desperate politicians who

are determined to capture the soul of the state. Consequently, those who genuinely want to build the state have recourse to eschew politics for fear of assassination and this has impinged on the democratic process. Moreover, the EMB required by law to be impartial so as to deliver credible elections is yet to level up to this expectation. Kurfi (2005) remarked that elections in Nigeria are synonymous with manipulation. The main aim is to exasperate the democratic aspirations of the people and the institutionalization of democratic tenets. These unpleasant electoral misconducts and practices have destructive consequences on Nigeria's democratic future because the trend has in fact undermined the possibilities of successful elections and the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. Over the years, the power of incumbency has threatened democracy in Nigeria. In order to remain in power, rulers especially at the federal level manipulate the system by influencing other institutions of the state.

The politics of money has become an issue that has hindered democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Votes are bought and sold to the highest bidder. To capture the soul of the Nigerian state, aspirants and their financiers make money available to purchase votes. Hence the commercialization of votes, rigging and financial inducement has made a tendency of democracy in Nigeria. Another issue that reoccurred in 2019 elections is the drop in the total number of voter turnout. Despite the voter education campaign embarked on by INEC and civil societies as well as patriotic Nigerians, the 2019 presidential election also witnessed a significant drop in total number of voter turnout which is sometimes elicited by wide scale violence that has led to the death of many as well as the destruction of properties and livelihood of people, before, during and after elections.

In view of the above, there is no reservation as to whether efforts have been made by experts, in recent times, to scrutinize the impact of the elections on the democratization process in Nigeria. The 2020 Edo state governorship election was adjudged to be fair. It is against this backdrop that the 2020 Edo state elections shall be interrogated to ascertain the degree to which Nigeria has been able to consolidate her democratic experience vis-à-vis elections.

Conceptual Evaluation Election

There is no universally acceptable definition of election. Election is a process by which eligible voters, or a percentage of it, elect their representatives to hold public office and exercise political power on their behalf. Election is one of the most important ways people participate in decisions that affects their lives (United Nations Development Programme, 2004). Ojo (2007) considers election as the method of selecting people for government by voting. He furthered that there are basically two types of election; Direct and Indirect. Direct election emphasizes direct participation of electorates in elections by choosing their preferred candidates. The candidate with the highest poll is affirmed the winner. This is the most popular form of election and it's common to all democracies. Hence Kapur (2006) contend that indirect form of election involves the body of intermediary elected representatives on behalf of the people.

More so, Fatai (2017) contend that elections are conventional standard for engendering political leadership through the involvement of the people. He added that elections could also be understood from a radical position as a tool for social change. This approach has also been critiqued for the way elections can be used to replicate class supremacy, which dents popular change. Nwozor & Oshewolo (2017) argue that elections occupy the central point in the milieu of voting process. Electoral process incorporates the whole gamut of processes that govern mass-based selection of candidates. Joseph (1990) as cited by Fatai (2017) remarked that an alteration in any democratic system typically arises through the instrumentality of

elections, because any political system, which downplays the importance of elections, is formalizing despotism, and political decline.

An election itself is a process by which the voters, or part of it, choose the people who hold public office and exercise some level of control over the elected officials. It is the means by which the public select and control their representatives. The consequence of this is that without election, there can be no representative government. Iyahi (2007) perceive election to mean the medium by which the various groups in a state grasp and resolve their claims to power through nonviolent means (Araba & Braimah, 2015). Furthermore, election is seen as a civic and political responsibility whereby the electorate and those vying for elective position engage in the process without being intimidated, coarsed or harassed. It requires a transparent system, and this is only possible where there is freedom of speech and information. With the freedom of information bill passed by the National Assembly it will help strengthen election thereby making the electorate to make informed choice. For elections to be free and fair there must be an independent EMB that is politically neutral and the existence of an independent judiciary (Abokwara, 2016).

Elections reflect and impact on the orderliness within society, and the stability, integrity and possibility of invigorating the political leadership through the change of corrupt members of the elite and the expansion of the non-elite elements. Economically, elections, properly conducted, promote an environment of capital mobility and higher productivity, especially in a post-authoritarian and post-conflict political order in dire need of reconstruction and development. Election is not an event rather a process through which the people express their right to recruit leaders to represent them as well as what the main focus of government should be. Thus, democratic elections offer the people the opportunity to confer legitimacy on government, reinstate its mandate or withdraw from it the authority to rule (Innocent, Alhassan & George, 2011 and INEC, 2019). As contended by Thomassen (2014), elections allow voters to decide the political shade of their government, making government answerable to the decision of the people. As well as produce a legislature that is representative of the distribution of policy preferences amongst the electorate.

Agbaje & Ajetumobi (2005) posit that election is an avenue for citizens to achieve representative government. However, the fact remains that a major requisite is that it must be credible to avail the people the sovereign right to decide who gets what, when and how through competitive voting contest (Sakariyau, Moh'd & Ummu, 2017). Elections neither operate in seclusion nor constitute an end to themselves rather elections are not only a ground for political struggle, but also for the aspirants and political parties but a way to connect with the people. The most common form of communication is varied political programs and their electoral varieties formed as part of election programming purpose (Nwazor & Oshewole, 2017 and Wojtasik, 2013).

Democratic Consolidation

Democratization according to Rakner & Menochal (2007) is broken into three major processes, which includes; liberalization, transition and consolidation. During the liberalization phase, the previous authoritarian government collapses. The transition phase is the term used to denote the beginning of consolidation phase and is established when democratic practices, rules and institutions have been entrenched in a way that the most relevant political actors accept their result.

Dahl (1989) introduced five measures into the democratic literature which can be used to mark the democratic process viz-a-vis equal voting opportunity, effective participation, enlightened understanding, agenda control, and inclusion of all adult citizens in collective decision making. These five criteria make the democratic process to be unswerving with the logic of political equality. Violating any of them not only renders the process undemocratic

but creates a mismatch with the logic of political equality. Nevertheless, Diamond (2002) asserts that democratic consolidation is a situation where democracy is progressively stable, when all political players capable of organizing any meaningful power or popular resulting not only obey the rules and norms of democracy but believe that their opponents (real and potential) will do so as well.

For Przeworski (1996), consolidation of democracy is possible when under certain political and economic circumstances a particular system of institutions becomes the only game in town, when everyone acts according to the laws that guides the democratic institutions, when losers want to do is to try again within the same institutions in which they have lost. Linz & Stepan (1996) corroborate Przeworski (1996) when they state that a consolidated democracy is “a political regime in which democracy as a complex system of institutions, rules, and patterned incentives and disincentives has become, in a phrase, ‘the only game in town’”. However, Ratsimbaharison (2016) contends that democratic consolidation in any society is near impossible with the absence of active and vibrant civil societies.

Okeke (2015) argues that democratic consolidation is a characteristic of all democracies hence no need for “defense mechanisms” especially in transitional democracies as in most African states. He maintained that democratic consolidation is not an end in itself but a continuous process required for democracy to be sustained in any given state. Democratic Consolidation describes the tasks of making new democracies protected, anticipated beyond the temporary, defending them against decline which could result to authoritarian rule, and building structures and institutions that will guide against any form of reversal. Hence the basic responsibilities of democratic consolidation include; developing democratic and political institutions as well as performance of decision makers. Ngwube (2013) contends that democracy is consolidated when it is firm, effective, efficient, transparent, concrete and accountable to the electorates. Thus, the process is multifaceted and depends on the national conditions which often rely upon power configuration of the state. He holds that for democracy to be effective there should be necessary rudiments such as obligation among the elites in upholding of democratic principles and norms, deep-rooted conviction of the citizens that democracy is the best form of governance, commitment by non-state actors in solidification and deepening democracy.

Adding to the debate, Ibietan & Ajayi (2015) assert that democratic consolidation is a process that requires subsequent improvement. They assert that democratic consolidation is a combination of numerous factors (redefinition of institutions and relations among political actors) functioning in an interdependent way. They further stated that democratic consolidation calls for cautious efforts by the governing elite and political class to agree on shared interest in instituting and safeguarding electoral processes, obeying electoral rules, circumventing destabilizing political demeanors, embedding healthy conflict management mechanisms in the political process. The net outcome is that democratic structures, institutions and processes are reinforced. A high point of consensus building amongst political class tends to form peaceful political environment. This combined with transparent and responsible governance plus public policy alignment, convincingly expounds mass mobilization and spurs improvement via democratic gains.

Schedler (1998) stated that democratic consolidation is used to describe the tasks of making new democracies secure, prospect beyond the short-term, guarding them against relapse to dictatorial domination, and building structures against subsequent reverse. However, Valenzuela (1990) argues that:

“... something that is “consolidated” has the quality of being seemingly immune to disintegration, there is a tendency to associate “consolidated democracies” with their stability and, by extension, to convert the passage

of time with no regime reversals and the absence of potentially destabilizing factors into the basic criteria of democratic consolidation” (Valenzuela 1900:4).

Democratic consolidation consequently integrates vast flecked governance issues that border on people-centred government, and responsive political leadership that is absolutely accountable to the electorate. It also connotes permanence of the regime. This is because consolidated democracies are immune against political squabbles. Stable democracies, sometimes experience political instability, could be as a result from dwindling economic fortunes which could culminate in social alterations. For instance, in Europe between 2011 and 2012, anti-austerity demonstrations were held as a result of the global economic recession that started in 2008 (Aluaigba, 2016).

Theoretical Underpinnings

Theories are set of maxims, aphorisms, premises and ideas useful for the explanation, interpretation, prediction and description of connections between and among phenomena. Political theory is associated with the description, explanation and prediction of political events and these can be investigated in the form of details of ideas and ideals, an ideology or means for social and economic transformation (Nwosu, 2010 and LPU, 2014).

Therefore, in analyzing and explaining the interface between election and democratic consolidation in Nigeria, this work adopts the Elite Theory as a framework for analysis. The Elite theory flourishes in the works of Robert Michels (1915) Gaetano Mosca (1939) and Vilfredo Pareto (1935). Other scholars that have extended the frontiers of the theory include: Mills (1956), Dahl (1958, 1961, and 1971) Domhoff (2009), Putnam (1976), Hoffmann-Lange (2010), Fukuyama (2011) amongst others. Elite are a small group of individuals who in each sphere of activity have succeeded and have arrived at a higher rank in the professional hierarchy. Elite theory is centred on the assumption that elite action has a causal effect on the relationship between the state and society. The pioneers of the elite theory contend that the existence of political elites is inevitable in all at least moderately complex societies. The elites are influential thus are able to influence policy outcome as well as the direction of the state. (Higley & Burton, 2006).

Shipman, Edmunds & Turner (2018) posits that elites were often assumed to repel democratization, because an empowered majority would inevitably vote to terminate their primitive accumulation of property and power. Nevertheless, the advent of democracy has seldom flounced elites away, nor even corroded their political influence or narrowed their social and economic advantage. They fostered that electoral management can often sustain elite rule by making it look credibly jeopardized, and does not always need the blunt instruments of stuffed ballots, intimidated voters, jailed or exiled and in some cases assassinate opposition leaders or candidates, and suppressed media. To stop voters tiring of a one-party system, hybrids democracies have learnt to tolerate a range of opposition parties, some winning sizeable representation. These discourage voters from organizing occupy protest movements, and organize new ideas which rulers can co-opt, blaming opponents if they fail.

The elites are sizeable in number who occupy the highest positions on the basis of certain attributes and marked qualities. Contemporary elitists offer a new typology of elite configuration in democracies; disunited, consensually united or ideologically united. Elites in advanced democracies are more consensually united while elite disunity is linked with new/unstable democracies (López, 2013). Elite usually converges. The concept of elite convergence is defined as phenomenon that often follows elite arrangements. It indicates a practice in which, in an unstable democracy, politically controlled anti-system elites discard radical opposition and agree a coalition tactic in order to intensify their chances of electoral

gain. Moreover, elites in new democracies sometimes diverge into opposing groups, each pursuing political supremacy at practically any cost and by any means. Power plays causing much brutality and violence are routine, and elite persons habitually lead very risky lives. With deep mutual cynicism and porous security, elites typically esteem open competitions for votes as merely another way by which enemies will undermine them (Higley & Burton, 2007).

This theory is appropriate in explaining the character of the political elites and cautious act to disrupt the outcomes of genuine elections in Nigeria. The acts that have deliberately undermined the efforts of the institution of state to consolidate democratic rule which has cumulated into vote buying, electoral malpractice, the use of religion and region as instruments of mobilization, propaganda and the use of the coercive apparatuses of the state to capture and remain in power. As Adibe (2015) opine, in diverged and fragile states like Nigeria that is divided across ethnic, regional and religion lines. The laws and systems, however as proposed, had be subjected to the same filters and markers through which the generality of the citizens and their social realities.

A cursory look at the Nigerian state it is alleged elections would always have the dominant ruling class and other members of the society on a collision course. It also means that electoral results must always be in favour of the ruling class that dominate and control the institutions and structures of the state. The pre-election, during and post-election violence that has rocked the state since the return of democracy is an attestation to this fact.

From the forgoing analysis, it becomes obvious that this theory helps us to understand the inability of the federal government and by extension INEC to conduct credible elections in Nigeria. And why the absence of credible election is bound to undermine democratic consolidation in the Nigeria.

Election and Democratic Consolidation: The Nexus

The standardization of democracy to determine its penetration and advancement towards consolidation often starts with the consideration of the electoral process. Beetham (1994) averred that one of the ways is the “two-election” test, or more properly the “transfer of power” test. For him, democracy is consolidated when a government that has itself been elected in a free and fair contest is defeated at a subsequent election and accepts the result. The goal of this measure is not aimed at retaining power rather it focuses is on losing power during election and accepting the outcome; because this reveals that influential political actors, and their sponsors, are willing to respect the rules of the game and the people’s choice above their continuous stay in power. For Ebegbulem (2011) consolidation of democracy is only possible where elections are designed to birth the will of the people. In other words, such election must be devoid of vote buying, rigging or any means intended to circumvent the process.

Oni (2014) asserts that for democracy to be consolidated, the durability test must be applied. The argument is that twenty (20) years of consistent competitive elections ought to be sufficient enough to adjudge a democracy consolidated regardless of the fact that power is not transferred to the opposition political party. This criterion broadened that uninterrupted and regular elections would have instilled in the people a mind-set that develops apathy for any alternative to democracy. It is therefore absurd for the voters to explore another system of appointing their leaders. Nevertheless, the preceding debate has manifestly demonstrated that no one criterion or condition is a ‘pure type’ on its own and that democratic survival is a product of a mishmash of factors functioning together. A buildup of these expediting conditions therefore offers the prospects of democratic survival and deepening.

Fatai (2017) contend that elections are pivotal to the consolidation of democracy, in other words balloting are the building blocks, nevertheless they do not stimulate democratic

consolidation in the absence of other liberal democratic ideologies such as constitutionalism, the rule of law, and political liberties. These principles serve as the basic tenet which inhibits and controls the character of political gladiators; hence they also promote democratic consolidation. He furthered that other structural and political aspects that promotes democratic consolidation comprise the role of the EMB, political parties and civil societies. Thus, Gambo (2006) summarized the nexus between election and democratic consolidation accordingly:

“.....election is one of the most critical civic engagements that characterize any liberal and competitive political system. It is an important exercise in the sense that if carefully, freely and fairly undertaken, it produces outcome that is almost mutually agreeable to all competing social groups, which are politically active within a given policy. Any political leadership which emerges from a free and fair electoral process enjoys consistent and considerable support of the citizenry and is scarcely questioned in terms of legitimacy” (Gambo, 2006: 88).

The Democratic Quality and Legitimacy of Elections

The quality of democracy also depends on its levels of freedom, pluralism, justice, and accountability. This is because election is a necessary condition for democratic system though not a sufficient condition (Nwankwo, 2018). As Fatai (2017) avers, the issue is not whether electoral democracy is the custom in new democracies, rather what is the nature and character of elections being achieved by the political elites? Moreover, Omotola (2010) posits that the form and quality of elections, either as a fortification of democratic consolidation or relapse, are largely dependent upon a series of factors. The most essential of these relates to the EMB and other institutional-political structures that surround it – including political parties, mass media, and the judiciary – the relations among them, and the extent to which they have been institutionalized.

Contributing to the debate, Elklit & Reynolds (2005) stated that the quality of a democratic election in fledgling democracies has three (3) distinguished attributes vis-à-vis Essential, Important and Desirable. The Essential quality includes; Legal framework, Election management, Access to ballot, Polling, Counting the vote and resolving disputes. Voter education and voter registration are the component of the important feature. The Desirable characteristic focuses on; constituency demarcation, campaign regulation and post-election procedures.

Lindberg (2006) opines that three fundamental values are pivotal to the democratic quality of elections. The principles include participation, competition and legitimacy. As a requisite, political participation entails established aspects which include voter turnout, opposition participation and authoritarian old guard. Participation is the proportion of electorates who cast their votes out of the total number of registered voters in other words, the higher the voter turnout the higher the democratic quality. The principle of participation emphasizes the role of the opposition in elections that is, the extent to which opposition parties are allowed to take part in the electoral process without any form of interruption. He advanced that in the absence of this form of participation both the political parties and the voting public suffers from a lack of guarantee of the usefulness of votes. In such condition, elections become an ‘institutional façade’. Authoritarian old guards simply mean, past autocrats who became ‘democrats’ must cast-off their authoritarian inclinations. If not, the democratic quality of the election would be influenced through unwillingness by them to comply with democratic rules and procedures. This reluctance portends threat to the quality of elections as well as to the

possibilities of democratic consolidation. Hence, he averred that those who do not exemplify political liberalization are not likely to enhance it.

In analyzing the issue of competition, Lindberg (2006) holds that the democratic quality of elections is characterized by four important factors vis-à-vis the winner's portion of the votes, the winning party's share of legislative seats, the second party percentage of legislative seats and turnover of power. The winner's bit of the votes is a fraction of the overall valid vote cast. He therefore argues that in spite of the fact that determining the intensity of electoral competition appears ambiguous, a significant point that has come to the fore is that the nearness in voter scores by candidates is an indication of the degree of electoral competition. For instance, a winning party that has a two-third majority in the legislature is likely to use its dominance to play a 'winner takes all politics' by using the power of incumbency to remain in power.

According to Lindberg (2006), the legitimacy of elections is beyond the procedures used rather it depends on how fairly the aspirants involved consent and testify to its credibility. Although legitimacy is often framed in terms of attitudes and sentiments, behaviour is debatably the best indicator. He posits that the incumbents support for democratic elections and reverence for the rules of the game is the ability to accept the electoral outcome if he/she is defeated in an election. If they immediately accept the result, concede defeat, and honor a peaceful rotation of power, it attests to the legitimacy of the election in their view. He concluded that a vital component in the assessment of democratic quality of election is the maintenance of electoral cycles any alternative to this indicate that the elite groups did not believe the election legitimacy.

Some scholars have argued that the function, legitimacy and democratic quality of elections should be analyzed from the perspective of the election of members of parliament. Thus, Thomassen (2014:3) contend that the major role of elections is to choose the members of parliament who together should serve as representative of the electorate. The criterion for the democratic quality of the system is how representative parliament actually is. Hence, there is no causal relationship between the election outcome and the formation of the government. He furthered that multiparty system is one of the characteristics of a consensus model of democracy, and usually an alliance of several parties is needed to form a majority government. Coalitions will ordinarily be all-encompassing, doing justice to the principle that not just a bare majority but as many people as possible can influence government policy.

Alemika (2007) however noted that election is a way of recognizing some of the essential tenets of democracy, particularly with citizens' involvement, which helps to guarantee the quality of governance and accountability on the part of elected officials. He added that, the quality of elections serves as an indicator of the extent to which democratic governance has been strengthened in a state. More so, Hamalai, Egwu & Omotola (2017) assert that the democratic quality of elections can be defined based on the decline in the contestation of electoral outcomes. They furthered that in Nigeria for instance, the number of elections appeal after the conclusion of the 2011 elections stood at 732 as against the 1,290 recorded after the 2007 elections. In 2015, the figure declined to 611 after the 2015 elections. This trend, to an extent, is reveals the increasing level of outcome of elections by losers and has significantly restored a degree of public confidence in the electoral process.

Methodology

The research, being a qualitative research design is hinged on documentary analysis method of social inquiry. The choice of Edo state is hinged on the fact that the election was a lone election thus the electoral umpire would be less challenged in terms of planning, logistics and all that is required for the conduct of election.

A critique of the Edo 2020 Gubernatorial Election

Amid the fear that surrounded the elections, especially with the state history of electoral violence. The election was critical to the two major political parties contending for the soul of the state; considering the importance of the election to the two major parties (APC and PDP). The APC seen the election was a means of reclaiming the state from the governor who defeated after getting the mandate of the people via the party. The PDP considering their wide acceptance in the south-south geopolitical zone considers it opportunity to pitch its dominion in the south-south thereby making the APC loss relevance.

Germane issues where raised in the cause of the election as the people saw it as an opportunity to reconfigure and guide the state against the emergence of a hegemonic power which has become a reoccurring phenomenon in Nigerian politics. Thus slogans like “Edo nor be Lagos” which literally means No man can impose anyone on us as in Lagos state, “Togba” meaning “It must complete” in line with constitutional qualification of two tenures of eight year of two tenures for governors.

The election was fraught with ballot snatching. Armed thugs were on parade and shootings, According to Onyeji (2020) the Youth Initiative Advocacy Growth and Advancement (YIAGA) observed that, “ballot box snatching, sporadic shootings and interference, and disruption of the election process, intimidation, and harassment of observers/journalists and vote-buying”. A report released by the Coalition of Democrats for Electoral Reforms (CODER), reveal that there were violent attack and shootings which led to the shooting of an INEC staff at Registration Area 10, Unit 6 in Etsako Central by some hooligans forcing the electorates to scrap for safety. Also, another ad-hoc staff sustains injury on the face (Egobiambu, 2020 & Vanguard, 2020).

There has been the prevalence of party interference which sometimes leads to disruption of election in some polling units. During the Edo 2020 election there was patronage, clashes, scrambling, tussle, confrontations and scuffle by party men that were battle ready. As Channels (2020) avers, an incident occurred at Emokpae Model Primary School in Oredo Local Government Area of the state. An agent of a political party had a dogfight with a supposed observer due to a misunderstanding. The politician who mistook the observer for another party agent, challenged him for sitting on a seat meant for the electoral officials. Some of these disruption lead to harassment and intimidation of independent observers, journalists and voters. As observed in the Edo 2020 election, observers were harassed and their observation materials were confiscated by party agents in Edogun Primary School Hall I, Polling Unit in Orhionmwon LGA and Ozolua Grammar School, Polling Unit 009 of Ward 10 in Ikpoba/Okha LGA (Onyeji, 2020). In unit 19 Ward 04 in Oredo LGA which happen to be voting center of the incumbent, was mayhem between party supporters (Nwafor, 2020).

It was observed that secrecy of the election was compromised as voters struggle to display how they voted in order for the buyers to ascertain the true nature of the choice. Electoral process has become a mere routine for constitutional change of government. Reports of electorates displaying their ballot after thumb printing was received by YIAGA Africa such as in Orhionmion II, Edogun Primary School Hall; Obodeko Primary School, PU 003 Amaharo, Ward 08 in Igueben LGA; Uelen-Ujugb Uromi Open Space VI PU 013 and Ward 4 in Esan North-East LGA (Onyeji 2020). Commercialization of vote during elections has become a reoccurring phenomenon. During the election cases of vote buy were recorded in Asoro Grammar School, PU 002 in Ward 1 of Egor LGA party agents distributed cash to influence voters. Similar incidents were also reported in Omo Nursery/Primary School, PU 005, Ward 1 in Egor LGA, where party agents were seen giving cash to voters. Similar incident was reported in Adams Int. Sch. Evbareke 1 Polling Unit in Egor, voters openly showed how they made their choice. Again, in Uromi-Open Space VI, 013, Uelen/Okugbe/Uromi, party representative distributed cash to voters (Onyeji 2020). Polling

centers has been reduced to commodity markets with many sellers and few buyers thus it was a case of the highest bidder. Party agents work to deliver their assigned polling unit(s).

The Smart Card readers (SCRs) have been deployed for two consecutive general elections and some other lone election. With over eight years of deployment, it expected to have been perfected and issues that are likely to occur such as the power and malfunction are resolved. However, during the Edo state election incidents of SCRs reader malfunction were recorded as some could not validate and authenticate electorate. As observed at Uhunmadumu Primary School polling unit in Ward 5, Units 14 , 15 and 16 in Emado Primary School in Ekpoma Esan West LGA. In Idumebo Primary School, Esan Central LGA, units 5 and 6, Ward 6 experience similar issue (Vanguard, 2020). It was observed that the card readers at PU 003 (Ogiyan Primary School, Utesse), of Ward 03 (Uhen) in Ovia North-East couldn't authenticate cards thus accreditation was done manually to the displeasure of voters and party agents. Again, another faulty SCRs was reported in polling unit 10 Ward 5 Owan East local government. Voting was delayed at Onewa Primary School, Amedokhian ward in Esan North-East local government. The ward has two polling units (001, 002) but the card reader for polling unit 001 was faulty. At PU 03, ward 04, oke-Irhue, Uhumwonde LGA, the SCRs also malfunctioned. (Adedigba & Yahaya, 2020).

There has been persistent decline in terms of voter turnover in election. This can be attributed to the rate of violence, trust for the electoral umpire and the inability for INEC to update its register by reviewing the names of electorate who may have relocated or passed. However, there incident of low turnout in PU 001, 002, 003, Evbobemwem primary school, Iyoba Ward, Orhionmwon LGA and also in PU 003, Ihumudumu Primary School III in Esan west LGA (Adedigba & Yahaya 2020). A cursory look at the elections in Edo state (1999 – 2020) has shown continuous drop as revealed in in the table 1:

Table 1: Voter turnout in Edo Elections (1999 – 2020)

| Election Year | Registered Voters | Total Vote | % of Turnout |
|---------------|-------------------|------------|--------------|
| 2020 | 2,210,534 | 550,242 | 24.89 |
| 2016 | 1,900,233 | 622,039 | 32.73 |
| 2012 | 1,555,776 | 647,698 | 41.63 |
| 2007 | 1,345,410 | N/A | N/A |
| 2003 | 1,432,891 | 1,142,519 | 79.74 |
| 1999 | 1,414,511 | 827,563 | 58.51 |

Source: Compiled by the author from the internet

Another issue that characterize the election was the delay of the voting process due to late arrival of INEC ad-hoc staff and materials. As noted by Adedigba & Yahaya (2020) at Uhumwonde, PU 1, Ward 2. Also, Etsako East Local Government Ward 1 (Agenebode) PU 4 (Upland waterworks) the voting process started behind schedule.

Here are the candidates, political parties, vote obtained and percentage as released by INEC

Table 2: 2020 Edo State Election Result

| S/N | Name of Candidates | Political party | Vote obtained | Percentage |
|-----|---------------------------|-----------------|---------------|------------|
| 1 | Edemakhiota G. Osaimiamia | AA | 107 | 0.020 |
| 2 | Mabel o. Oboh | ADC | 1,370 | 0.255 |
| 3 | Obio L. Emmanuel | ADP | 2,374 | 0.442 |

| | | | | |
|----|-------------------------|------|---------|-------|
| 4 | Osagie A. Ize – Iyamu | APC | 223,644 | 41.61 |
| 5 | Osagie L. Idehen | APGA | 177 | 0.033 |
| 6 | Igbineweka Osamuode | APM | 57 | 0.011 |
| 7 | Amos O. Areloegbe | APP | 78 | 0.014 |
| 8 | Osifo U.E. Isaiah | LP | 267 | 0.050 |
| 9 | Agol E. Tracy | NNPP | 256 | 0.048 |
| 10 | Stevie N. Ozono | NRM | 573 | 0.107 |
| 11 | Godwin N. Obaseki | PDP | 307,955 | 57.30 |
| 12 | Felix I. Obayangbon | SDP | 323 | 0.601 |
| 13 | Osagiobare Jones | YPP | 132 | 0.045 |
| 14 | Akhalemhe Amiemenoghena | ZLP | 117 | 0.035 |
| | Total | | 537,430 | 100 |

Source: INEC (2020) percentage computed by the author

Conclusion

The very idea that drives of democracy is that people have the responsibility to choose individuals to govern them, and that the leaders express and implement policies for the common will of the people. In every democratic system, elections constitute the surviving mechanism of the democratic process. Therefore, the way elections are organized, makes the consolidation of democracy near impossible in Nigeria. It has become a ritual where voters only interact with their rulers during election. Hence Nigeria's democratic development seems gloomy as electorates no longer matter in the country's democracy and by extension on issues that affect them.

The study interrogates the nexus between elections and democratic consolidation and discovered that credible elections have a role to play in the consolidation of Nigerian's nascent democracy. Clearly, the failure of Nigeria to conduct credible elections has wedged negatively on the efforts of the Nigerian state to imbed and consolidate her democratic experience. This is so because, the conduct of the 2020 Edo state elections were burdened with the issue of vote merchandizing, violence and power play by incumbents, political parties and emerging good father. In view of this the understated recommendations are put forward for policy implementation.

One, that the commercialization of votes should be discouraged by all. Security agents should arrest and arraign vote merchant and buyers before courts of competent jurisdiction so that Section 131 (2) and section 124 (2) of the 2006 and 2010 Electoral Act (as amended) which indict any voter that collects gift (financial, material or any form of exchange) directly or indirectly should take it course. Furthermore, civil societies and patriotic individuals should embark on massive and aggressive campaign at the grassroots level to enlighten the public on the need to shun monetizing of their voting. On the part of government, there should be deliberate efforts at improving the economy and the law to take its cause where persons breach the electorate act.

Two, the INEC should organize a symposium for party representative who will be on field on the day of the election on the need to conduct themselves in a civil manner. Party men found guilty of any irregularity should be made to face the law.

Three, the budget of INEC as well as should be funded from consolidated fund in other to avert issues arising from bureaucracy which could hinder the implementation of logistic plan which has led to reoccurring postponement of elections and to a large extent demoralize electorates.

Four, the issues that surrounds the use of SCRs should be reassessed to avoid voluntary disenfranchisement of voters who may become impatient due to the delay. Also there is need for the SCRs to be upgraded to higher versions to increase the speed.

Five,, there is need for grass root voter education and issues that lead to voter apathy be urgently addressed.

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