Post Election Peace Building and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria

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Abstract

Electoral violence and other irregularities have been entrenched and sustained within the Nigerian electoral system since after independence. This paper investigates and identifies the post-election peace building efforts as they affect the 2015 General election. While it is _ germane to note that the last national elections may have been a departure from the previous ones, suffice to say that there were some hitches here and there. However, there is a general consensus that the 2015 general elections represent a giant leap in the democratic consolidation project of Nigeria. The heat in the polity led many to conclude that Nigeria would disintegrate.in 2015. Going by these realities, it was incumbent on all actors and stakeholders (internal and external) to pursue, craft and apply peace building strategies that could calm the fraying nerves of potential conflict hot beds. Several peace building efforts including the Abuja Peace Accord were utilized to achieve peace. To examine the post-election peace building and democratic sustenance, the paper adopts the social rules systems theory as its theoretical framework. The paper found that peace building efforts by the Independent National Electoral Gommission, civil society, other partners and most essentially, President Goodluck Jonathan's acceptance of defeat led to the relative peace experienced especially after the elections. It is without doubt that the success of the 2015 elections has helped to further deepen and consolidate Nigeria's democracy. To continue to sustain and improve peace and by extension Nigeria's democracy, the paper recommends that all democratic institutions and civil societies should be encouraged by government and other stakeholders to play by* the rules and laws establishing them.

Keywords: Democracy, Democratic Consolidation, Elections, Peace building and Nigeria

Introduction

Elections seem to be the most transparent and acceptable means for leadership recruitment in societal setups. This connotes that elections are synonymous with democratic practice around the

world. As an entire process, there are pre-election, election and post-election activities that culminate in the emergence of managers of the polity. Since 1999, Nigeria, like many other democratic nations has consistently utilized elections in her polity. Like other elections in the past, the 2015 general election also went through the process of pre-election and election. It is therefore important to examine postelection issues as presented by the 2015 general election. Such postelection issues are built around peace building and democratic consolidation.

To perform this task, the study conceptualizes key concepts such as democracy, election, peace building and democratic consolidation. Social rules system theory is utilized as theoretical framework. The paper also x-rays in brief, the historical trajectory of elections in Nigeria.as well as post election peace building efforts in the 2015 general-elections. Such post-election issues which either make or mar democratic consolidation are built around peace building. An attempt is also made to connect peace building and democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification Election

Simply put, an election can be perceived as a formal decision making process by which a group of people select an individual to hold a particular position. In other words, Nwolise (2007) explains that it is the process of choosing officer(s) or representatives of an organization or a group by the votes of its qualified members. It can also be seen as a means through which the electorate exercise their sovereign right to recruit individuals who will govern them. This affords the electorate, the sovereign opportunity not only to confer legitimacy to a government through the ballot but also an opportunity to renew its mandate if necessary or withdraw from it the authority to govern.

This is in fact the premise of accountability of leaders to the people. Before now, it was scholarly to conclude that the practice

of democracy was incomplete without elections but recent transitions in a few countries may have proven this assertion otherwise. Though it may be arguable as to whether such governments still qualify as democratic.

Democracy

Kwasau (2013) opines that democracy implies a governmental system where eligible citizens have rights to participate equally (directly) or (indirectly) through elected representatives within the established laws through which the society runs. This posture is a far cry from Makinda's (1996) earlier position that enunciates the view that there is no clinical or scientific definition of democracy. He instead highlights the main features of democracy as free competition among political parties, periodic elections and freedom of thought, assembly as well as expression.

Makinda's idea that there is no universal definition for the concept of democracy is concomitant with Dahl's (2000). Dahl postulates that within the enormous and often impenetrable thicket of ideas on democracy, it is germane to rather identify some criteria that constitute a democracy. These criteria include effective participation, voting equality, enlightened understanding, exercising final control over the agenda and inclusion of adults. To him, democracy must also be associated with provision of essential rights, self determination, political equality and above all must seek peace and prosperity. In line with Makinda and Dahl, we harp on the components of democracy and recognize same as more concrete than the futile attempt at defining it.

Democratic Consolidation

Democratic consolidation suggests longevity and sustainability of democratic practice and principles among a people. It also connotes the sustained maturity exhibited in the conduct of democratic practice that gives birth to long-term viability and transference to good life for a greater number of people.

Peace Building

Peace building as popularized by the United Nations is an "action to solidify peace and avoid relapse into conflict". Needless to add that establishing and consolidating democracy requires an intersection with peace building in reality. The two do not just align, they are mutually reinforcing. Evans, Lane, Pearler and Turner (2013) provide evidence that three "spheres" represent the nexus where democracy building and peace building overlap. The spheres; democratic institutions, civil society and local capacity according to them demonstrate independent relationship in practice that contribute to simultaneously enhance peace and democracy.

Theoretical Framework

The social rules system theory is a result of the collaborative work of Baumgartner, Bums, Deville, Flam, Dcman, Midttun, and Olsson ct al in the late 1970s. The theory assumes that human social activity is organized and regulated by socially produced and reproduced systems of rules. These rules are derived from languages, customs and codes of conduct, norms and laws, and in social institutions such as community, family, markets, government outfits among others.

The thesis further postulates that the making, interpretation and implementation of social rules are universal in human society, as are their reformulation and transformation. Individuals and other human agents produce, carry and reform these systems of social rules and this often takes place in more ways than one. The theory also states that changes in the social rule system can be endogenous and exogenous to the society. This means the implementation of rule and the maintenance of order will as a matter of necessity call for cumulative experience, adjustment and adoption among others.

In reality, social rule systems strongly influence actions and interactions in the society but the human agency is no less prominent in this dialectical process played out by competent and endured actors. The actor situational analysis, interpretations and strategic responses to immediate pulls and pushes leads actors to a particular position.

Like other societies, the Nigerian society has had its rules sourced from languages, cultures and norms among others and has continued to bring these social rules system to bear on all levels of human interaction. These rules as applied to individuals and institutions have consistently influenced and also generated opportunities for social actors to behave in ways that would otherwise be impossible. An example of these opportunities may be to coordinate with others or mobilize and gain systematic access to strategic resources or better still, to commend and solve complex social challenges by putting together group actions.

If social rule system is allowed in individual and institutional life in Nigeria, the individual citizens in Nigeria will be regulated by the rules and laws provided by various democratic institutions like Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the Nigerian Constitution, Electoral Act, the judiciary as well as law enforcement agencies. In addition, if these social rules are seen as sacrosanct, it will suggest that elections will not be rigged, the court will interpret the rules exactly as provided, political thuggery will be uncelebrated and money politics will be shown the way out. The result of these will consciously reflect in the recruitment of quality leaders that can sustain the Nigerian polity through provision and delivery of democratic dividends to all and sundry. The delivery of democratic dividends to the people to a reasonable extent would translate to peace. The opposite has however, been the situation in Nigeria where not individuals or even organizations are regulated by set rules, hence electoral fraud that

drift the Nigerian society further away from achieving democratic consolidation and by extension peace.

It is to be noted that while the social rules systems theory attempt to capture the reality of electoral system in Nigeria as indicated above, it lost track of the fact that human societies in reality can hardly be governed completely by established rules. That is why it is commonplace for some societies to bend rules for particular purposes. A common example may be found in what we sometimes call 'political judgment'.

Brief Historical Trajectory of Elections in Nigeria

The history of elections in post-independence Nigeria dates back to the 1960s but attention is paid to the elections in the Fourth Republic beginning from 1999. Though there were several plans by various military administrations to return to democracy, it was General Abdulsalami Abubakar that finally planted the seed in 1999. The 1999 general election came up with three main political parties. The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), the All Peoples Party (APP) and the Alliance for Democracy (AD)

The PDP flag bearer, the former Head of State, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo competed and won the election against the allied candidate of the APP and AD, Chief Olu Falae. It is important to note that the 1999 election was adjudged by many as a compensation contest that was carefully crafted by the military oligarchy to allow for military electoral infractions against Nigerians in general and the Yorubas in particular. The lackadaisical attitude shown towards the election by Nigerians was premised on the lack of trust in the military to hands-off power. This however, gave the military junta the lee way to manipulate and hand over power to her preferred candidates (Osinakachukwu and Jawan, 2011).

As soon as four years elapsed, Nigeria was to attempt consolidating her democracy; this opportunity gave many people

hope in the Nigerian democratic project. The 2003 general elections however, saw more desperate politicians having seen the kind of money that accrued from politics. The contest of 2003 was generally adjudged by commentators and international observers as largely flawed by electoral malpractices and irregularities (Aina, 2006).

Such malpractices as observed by *European* Commission (2003) and Commonwealth observers were to the extent that election outcomes were fixed in the north central, south-south and southeast (Osinakachukwu and Jawan, 2011). There was wide spread electoral fraud. The elections were generally and clearly marred by rigging, violence and voters' intimidation (Human Rights Watch, 2004). The situation as it was called for reactions from the likes of Momoh (2005) who described the election as "Presidential Authoritarianism". In his view, it is questionable whether what the country had in 1999 and 2003 could rightly and conveniently pass as an election and not selection or even allocation of portfolios. The 2003 general elections maintained most of the candidates that won elective seats in 1999, from the president to the state governors and to law makers. Though the 2003 elections were described as a sham by most scholars as exemplified above, suffices to state that the elections became the water shade in the history of Nigeria as this became the maiden peaceful civilian to civilian transition in the land.

Though precarious, Nigerian democracy sustained itself through to 2007 when new set of elections were conducted. The general elections, like the ones before were contested in a turbulent political atmosphere that saw agitation, tenure elongation issues, a sustained request for constitutional review to give INEC real autonomy and the accusation of Vice President Atiku Abubakar for corruption. Other issues that contributed in heating the polity were the persistent Niger Delta uprising about resource control, the argument about power shift between the North and the South and

later, the accusation that President Obasanjo handpicked his successor in a fraudulent election that his successor, Musa Yar'Adua also faulted his means and method of recruitment and promised to reform the system that brought him in as a President.

Though the 2007 general elections were also fraudulent, the 2003 elections, on comparative basis with the 2007 elections, Iyayi (2007) remarked "surpassed the 2003 elections in the level of fraud, violence, rigging, criminality and complicity by the various organs of the state in electoral force that occurred." On their part, the International Republican Institute observed that the 2007 elections fell below the standard set by previous Nigerian elections and international elections (Osinakachukwu and Jawan, 2011).

The 2011 elections were keenly contested by Goodluck Jonathan and Mohammadu Buhari. The former became the first minority leader to win Presidential Elections in Nigeria having become the incumbent as a result of his predecessors' death in office. The 2011 elections also experienced an upsurge of violence in several states of the federation; flawed voters' registration exercise that resulted in an inflated voter roll. There were also logistics deficiencies and procedural inconsistencies that gave rise to the death of over thousands of people making the 2011 election the bloodiest election in Nigerian history (African Briefing, 2011). Arising from the foregoing and on the prompting of the President Jonathan an Uwaise Electoral Reform Committee was setup to think new ways of improving on future elections. This effort was further supported with a Presidential promise for free, fair and credible elections in 2015.

The 2015 general elections became the fifth quadrennial elections to be held after the return to civil rule in 1999. The February 2015 date that was first scheduled for the general elections was shifted by six weeks by the electoral body due to security reasons and sundry matters. In an effort to stamp out rigging and other electoral malpractices, INEC deployed

Permanent Voter Cards and Smart Card Readers for the elections. The cost of this technology arguably made it the most expensive election ever conducted in Nigeria.

The result of the elections did not only reflect the dissatisfaction with the ruling PDP that was in control of government paraphernalia for sixteen years, it was a clear communication that Nigerians wanted change. The desire of the Nigerian people as reflected in the results of 2015 elections were respected completely by President Goodluck Jonathan who conceded defeat to Mohammadu Buhari, the All Progressive Congress (APC) candidate even when results were yet to be declared by the electoral umpire.

While there is a general consensus that the 2015 elections may have had its setbacks and hitches, it cannot go without observing that the elections were historic as it was the first time since the transition from military to civilian rule that an opposition party wrestled and received power from the incumbent. The elections were adjudged by the ECOWAS and European Union Observer (2015) land Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) (2015) as acceptable considering the fact that they largely met the criteria of being free and transparent. In other words, the elections w ere adjudged the most credible and transparent in the history of Nigeria. The accolades were not merely earned; they are a result of thorough peace building efforts of actors and stakeholders in the Nigerian project. The next section will be dedicated towards attempting an examination, ofpeace building efforts in Nigeria's 2015 election.

Post-Election Peace Building Efforts in Nigeria: The 2015 General Elections

It is generally accepted that elections in Nigeria are usually characterized by fierce competition and post-election disputes. Orji (2014), writing before 2015 general elections conceived that the 2015 elections may be the fiercer, prompting general concern about

the likelihood of destabilizing outcomes. This perception was shared by most commentators, actors and stakeholders in the elections. It was observed that many people stockpiled food, high network individuals evacuated their families and relatives, expatriate workers returned home and citizens living in distant areas from their home towns returned in anticipation of crises (Fleming 2015; Akwayiran, 2015). There was also grave concern about the conduct of elections especially in the three northeastern states of Bomo, Adamawa and Yobe, when the nation was waging war against terror unleashed by the Boko Haram Sect.

The critical question was as to whether the underlying political settlement that has helped Nigeria to hold together since inception was sufficiently robust to ensure that the political centre of the Nigerian state held in 2015 and perhaps beyond. This question became necessary because the country has been held together majorly by the ability and willingness of different parts of Nigerian elites who agree deals on the distribution of power and resources (Lunn and Harari, 2015). As clearly as it was that Nigeria was faced with a debilitating situation, so was it even clearer for the electoral body, concerned individuals, internal and external actors and stakeholders. The situation as it was in particular drew the attention of some high network individuals and states that were actually aware of the strategic importance of the Nigerian state in Africa and the wider world.

Before the post-election peace building efforts, there were conflict mitigations or nullification efforts that were embarked upon by actors and stakeholders led by INEC. INEC introduced four key innovations that increased the credibility of the 2015 elections: the introduction and use of Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs), the introduction and use of Smart Card Readers (SCRs) for biometrics verification of thumb prints during accreditation, the increased deployment of party agents at polling units across the nooks and crannies of the country and the implementation of a

voting system where all potential voters would first be accredited, then all accredited voters would finally vote, everyone who had voted would be invited to remain at the polling unit to witness counting and announcement of results (Orji and Iwuamadi, 2015). These steps helped in rekindling public confidence in Nigeria's electoral system.

Also worthy of mention as means of extenuating the electoral process is the electoral umpires' creation of INEC's Citizens Contact Centre (ICCC). The centre served as a situation room that was responsible for direct real-time reception of feedback from citizens (Orji and Iwuamadi, 2015). The discharge of social responsibility as enshrined in INEC's work scheme was in tandem with keeping with the rules of the institution, as earlier identified in the social rules system thesis. Efforts towards peace building in the 2015 elections on the part of other actors and stakeholders include the persistent pressure and pleas from well-meaning individuals like Kofi Annan, Emeka Anyaoku and states like the United States of America. Annan and Anyaoku were instrumental to a peace accord that was signed by the presidential flag-bearers. Others behind this peace commitment were development partners including the five permanent members of the United Nations (U.N) Security Council as well as traditional and religious leaders (UNDP, 2015).

Proceeding with the signing of the accord was one of the efforts by Professor Bolaji Akinyemi and others who encouraged the presidential candidates of both the APC and PDP to desist from their engagement in hate speeches and messages; a situation that had heightened violence by their various supporters (Ugbudian, 2015). The agreed candidates among other things, pledged to refrain from inciting violence but to instead speak out against same, engage in issue- based campaigns rather than religious, tribal and ethnic persuasions. The document also challenged stakeholders in

the 2015 elections not just to play by the rules but to be seen to act by the rules.

Other efforts at peace building were seen in entreaties to the candidates and parties to vigilantly monitor the entire electoral process (Orji and Iwuamadi, 2015). In addition, many other civil organizations engaged in peace Campaigns to compliment efforts by INEC, Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and National Orientation Agency (NOA). The media also organized a Nigeria Media Peace Day. The day which was successful was the first of such initiative in the broadcast industry. The central discourse of the day was for the broadcast industry to concentrate on airing strong, positive content in support of peaceful election.

National efforts were complimented by high profile peace messages by international actors. One of such was the visit of Mr. John Kerry, the U.S Secretary of States who cautioned against violence and warned that trouble mongers will be restricted from entering the U.S. (Orji and Iwuamadi, 2015) also reported that Kerry's visit was followed by the visit by Vice President Joe Biden who enjoined the two main presidential candidates to embrace peace and shun violence. Other such efforts were the video messaging from President Barack Obama to Nigerian people, David Cameroun's (UK Prime Minister) and Ban ki Moon's (UN Secretary General) public call for free and fair elections in Nigeria.

When it became evident that the peace accord was not strictly adhered to, the National Peace Committee was formed to facilitate the renewal of parties' commitment to the accord. The committee as chaired by Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar, Nigeria's former Military Head of State, consisted of opinion and national leaders as well as respected religious leaders. The intervention of the committee sent deterrent messages to potential trouble mongers and helped to mitigate fraying nerves before, during and after elections (Orji and Iwuamadi, 2015).

Peace Building and Democratic Consolidation

Tension and misunderstanding between individuals and groups often underpin post-election processes since the return to civil rule. According to Call and Cook (2003), this situation is premised on the fact that the tools and personnels for renewed conflict or violence are all too readily available and populations have conditioned to see violence as an acceptable and rational means of resolving a dispute. In a bid to keep to the rules and principles of democracy, democrats cannot afford to lose the opportunities to apply conflict resolutions techniques like dialogue and negotiation. The foregoing suggests a frustrating reality that peace building and democratic consolidation are two vast and interconnected fields. 1 lence, there is a troubling knowledge that lack of attention to one element is likely to weaken the performance of another (Evans, Lane, Pealer and Turner, 2013).

In the light of the above, it is needful to consider the following nexus spheres. They include democratic institutions, civil society and local capacity. Evans, Lanes, Pealer and Turner, (2013) explained that while strong democratic institutions depend on trust and accountability to function maximally and peacefully, local capacity building and civil society are both vital to the development of this trust and accountability which are the key components of peace building.

Strong democratic institutions from the basic essentials of functional democracy, they are not just important to democratic consolidation because they provide the framework for democratic functioning but also because as components of peace, they can address conflict or breach of peace.

However, democratic institutions can also be detrimental to democratic consolidation if such institutions are poorly designed or not run within the dictates of democratic sustenance. For instance, frequent elections, as an essential component of democratic consolidation may resolve conflict or exacerbate it. It is evident

that sometimes, the competition promoted by elections becomes the fault line for violence between opposing groups (Lyon, 2002). This has been the practical experience of the Nigerian state for most of the times.

Civil society as a sphere of democratic consolidation and peace building also supports democracy in several ways. Without a functional civil society, democratic consolidation can hardly be achieved. The civil society does not only service as a connecting bridge between government and the people, it allows minorities and marginalized groups to organize themselves and be heard in government and in their communities. The civil society, more than that, can serve as a check on government power and protect the people from government tyranny (Evans, Lane, Pealer and Turner, 2013). The role of TMG and other civil society organizations in Nigeria in peace building and enlightening the Nigerian public especially in the 2015 general elections cannot be over-emphasized.

However, like elections, civil society has the potential to weaken democracy and threaten peace. The organizations can have agenda of one group over another which can create or exacerbate the inequalities and grievances that breed destructive intergroup conflict, or by acting in collaboration and complicity with an ineffective, corrupt or malevolent government (Fisher and Zimina, 2009).

Local capacity which is the final sphere includes grassroot peace building initiative such as reconciliation, healing and relationship-strengthening, as well as local governance support initiative. Local capacity building strengthens civil society by providing the human and social capital upon which civil society organization depends (Orji and Iwuamadi, 2015). When all three sphere are strong, they work together to fortify one another and contribute to lasting peace and sustainable democracy.

Conclusion and Way Forward

The paper established that elections are a principal and crucial institution of democracy in the world. Periodic elections help sustain democracy in both transitioning countries and advanced democracies. However, elections may breed breach of peace within and among political opponents especially if and when institutions are not entrenched and thoroughly regulated to perform within the rules and laws establishing them.

This may be even more so because conflict is inevitable in human interaction. Therefore, there is bound to be breach of the peace from time to time. This reality ignites human activities towards invoking means of peace building. Such efforts are geared within the repositioning of democratic institutions, civil society and building local capacity towards the achievement of peace.

Nigerian elections have been marred by constant violence and other irregularities since after the return to democratic rule. A focus on the 2015 general elections reveals that peace building activities by all actors and stakeholders that cut across all the spheres culminated into the relative peace that was achieved before, during and after the elections. This has provided yet another opportunity for the Nigerian state to experience a new government thereby sustaining her democracy.

To achieve results or outcomes better in. the 2019 general election process and after, government and other relevant stakeholders should ensure that democratic institutions and civil society work maximally within the set rules. Local capacity to breed and sustain peace should be encouraged by government and all stakeholders. This will not only improve the Nigerian democratic project, but will further consolidate it.

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