

Presidential Election in Nigeria 2023 Trial and Tribulation of Democracy

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Abstract

Political power to the people is the key to democracy. The famous Abraham Lincoln saying, government of the people, for the people and by the people, provides the basic structure of a democratic system. If the general masses are the custodian of power, then there must be a mechanism which should make the people the trustee of power. Election of the person or group of persons to exercise that power is the mechanism needed for the system. Nigerians love democracy. After much trial and tribulation, they have adopted a presidential democratic system. The next Presidential election in Nigeria will be held in February 2023. The election process is so lengthy and cumbersome that it takes a year from the day when political parties announce the names of their candidates till a voter comes out from his home to the pooling booth to cast his/ her vote in favor of his chosen candidate. Nigeria is beset with the problems of regionalism, ethnicity, religious favoritism. Cultural diversity, political instability, low economic growth, in spite of the flow of billion dollars' worth of oil, are yet other problems, Nigerians must face to survive as a strong, viable modern, democratic state in Africa. Last but not least, a candidate in order to win the office of the Presidency, must overcome two constitutional hurdles. First, he must have received a plurality of votes cast in his favor. 2nd he must have received at least 25% of votes in two thirds of the total number of states. It means the candidate must have received 25% of votes in 24 states out of the total 36 states. Presidential system of Nigeria is so lucrative particularly to the Western media that it cannot afford to ignore its dynamic nature. Nigeria will now serve as an example of democracy in the third world. It will be a beacon light.

Keywords: *Democracy, Presidential System, Election, Constitutional hurdles, Beacon light*

Introduction

Nigeria is a country in West Africa. The country shares its land border with the Republic of Benin in the West, Chad on the East, Cameroon in the South-East and Niger in the North. Its coast lies in the Gulf of Guinea in the South. The population of Nigeria has never been officially accepted and declared. It has always been a source of political discontent. Generally, it is believed to be about two hundred million or a little more. (The World Factbook, 2022)

Though Presidential elections will be held on 25th February 2023, the preparation had begun a year earlier. Normally, it is narrated that there are eighteen political parties registered with the Election Commission. The two most famous, competitive, and viable political groups which are commonly known as political parties are APC and PDP. The Presidential candidates of APC and PDP are BOLA TINUBU and ATIKU ABUBAKAR respectively. This treatise will be based mainly on the policies, election activities and manifestoes of these two parties. Their activities and policies will be analyzed in the context of the general political environment of the country.

Two times Muslim means Presidential candidate is a Muslim, and he has chosen another Muslim as Vice Presidential candidate. APC presidential candidate BOLA TINUBU is a Muslim, and he has chosen his running mate Alhaji SHETTIMAA who is also a Muslim. This Muslim-Muslim ticket is unexpected in the Nigerian political environment. A member of Nigerian elite or even a common citizen or a player in Nigerian political field would expect a Presidential candidate, if he is Christian, to nominate a Muslim as his Vice-presidential candidate. (Africa News, 2022)

Significance of the study

The study will reflect the true political structure of the country within its norms and values. The study will reveal the intensity of the role of tribalism, ethnicity, regionalism, and religion in relation to political and social structure in Nigeria. A mechanism of a few research questions in this regard would be adopted to reach out some conclusion. The significance of the study stems from the fact that Nigeria is regarded as the leader of Democratic Africa.

We are in a nuclear age and the era of cold war is over. The Third World War is not likely to occur in the near future and the coming century will be an African century. As the days of military security pacts have gone, Globalization and international trade will be the topics of the new generation. The Third World economy has already attracted the attention of the world leaders. Terrorism and the terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaida, Tahrik Taliban Pakistan and BOKO HARAM in Nigeria have posed greater and potential security threat to the international peace.

West Africa has gained importance in academic and research fields, therefore, attracted the attention of scholars as well as statement. It has presented itself as a laboratory to the political scientists and experts of International Relations. Most countries of this region are beset with the problems of political instability, low economic development and lack of social harmony.

In terms of the size, resources and population (National Power), Nigeria is perhaps the most viable state in Africa. She is the largest and potentially most powerful state on the African continent. It is equipped to play a leading role in the international community. Nigeria is an active member of African Union and OPEC and Ecowas. Nigerian trade is heavily oriented towards the West both in Exports and Imports.

Nigerian Foreign Policy is to a very large extent determined by both domestic factors and external conditions. Nigeria possesses legitimate right to claim leadership role in West Africa. The first Nigerian Prime Minister Sir Abu Bakar Tafewa Balewa referring the dominant position of Nigeria in West African region, claimed a dominant role on subtle and moral grounds. Sir Abu Bakar was neither militant nor radical in his approach to foreign policy. The basis of Nigerian foreign policy is the desired goal of African Unity. Keeping in view the political, geographical, and cultural division of the continent, the desired African Unity is far from being materialized.

Objectives

Our foremost objective is to evaluate the role of media and explore its effect on Nigerian politics. Nowadays the media means methods and ways to communicate information. Media not only communicates information but also formulates public opinion. Media has assumed an indispensable role and has become a part of social, cultural, and political milieu in the present-day world. Media is considered as a mirror which makes things clearer and unearths mysteries surrounding political and cultural issues. Media includes newspapers, T.V., radio, magazines and books. Some of the Nigerian newspapers who could claim to be the voice of the masses are: Vanguard, Daily News, Daily Nigeria, The Punch and the Nation.

Literature Review

Nigeria is a country in West Africa. The country shares its land border with the Republic of Benin in the West, Chad on the East, Cameroon in the South-East and Niger in the North. Its coast lies in the Gulf of Guinea in the South. The population of Nigeria has never been officially accepted and declared. It has always been a source of political discontent. Generally, it is believed to be about two hundred million or a little more. It certainly has the largest population in the continent of Africa. It ranks number six in the world. Geographically, it occupies an area of nine hundred thousand kilometers.

Though Presidential elections will be held on 25th February 2023, the preparation had begun a year earlier. Normally, it is narrated that there are eighteen political parties registered with the Election Commission. The two most famous, competitive, and viable political groups which are commonly known as political parties are APC and PDP. The Presidential candidates of APC and PDP are BOLA TINUBU and ATIKU ABUBAKAR respectively. This treatise will be based mainly on the policies, election activities and manifestoes of these two parties. Their activities and policies will be analyzed in the context of general political environment of the country.

DOMESTIC Milieu in Regard to Presidential Election

Nigeria is a Federation and in spite of the fact that the country experienced a long period of military rule since its independence in 1960 Nigerians love democracy. Survival of the Federation has been one of the tense political problems of Nigeria. Whenever civilian rule was restored after the handing over power by the military, the Nigerians welcomed it with jubilation and joy. This phenomenon was witnessed in 1979 when the first civilian President Alhaji Shehu Shagari took oath as the first powerful civilian President in the Presidential system of the country. The current Constitution of Nigeria for restoration of civilian rule, it seems, has been accepted by the general public. The proof of the popularity is the continuation of this democratic Presidential system which has seen both Muslim and Christian occupants successfully completing their tenure. The present incumbent is President Muhammadu Buhari a Muslim. Earlier Retired General Obasanjo and Goodluck Jonathan were elected Presidents whereas both of them were Christians. (Catham House, 2022)

Political miracle happens in Nigeria, particularly in the present century of democratic regimes. Both Obasanjo and Muhammad Buhari are retired generals of the army and yet both of them were democratically elected Presidents. Both represented a true Nigerian picture. Buhari is a Muslim and a citizen of the Northern part of Nigeria, while Obasanjo is a Christian and a citizen of Southern part of Nigeria. The Presidential election of 2023 will usher a Muslim President as both principal candidates are Muslims. PDP's candidate ATIKU ABUBAKAR is from a Northern state, while BOLA TINUBU is from a Southern state. Ironically in 2019 Presidential elections both candidates were Muslims. Current Presidential candidate from PDP Atiku Abubakar was defeated by Muhammad Buhari. Buhari is termed limited. He cannot seek another election under the provisions of the Nigerian Constitution. (Amadu Sesay, 1997)

Criticism Against Muslim- Muslim Ticket: A HUE and CRY

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Muslim, and he has chosen his running mate Alhaji SHETTIMAA who is also a Muslim. This Muslim-Muslim ticket is unexpected in the Nigerian political environment. A member of Nigerian elite or even a common citizen or a player in Nigerian political field would expect a Presidential candidate, if he is Christian, to nominate a Muslim as his Vice-presidential candidate. Likewise, if he belongs to Southern region, his vice-presidential nominee should belong to Northern region. The Constitution of Nigeria does not stipulate these conditions. There is no restriction imposed as such in the Constitution. The critics of Muslim-Muslim ticket have started blowing such unwritten custom. Many members of the APC (All Progressive Congress) have even indicated to quit the party. Anti-Buhari and anti-North newspaper (The Punch, 2022), reported that “A former Secretary to the Government of Federation Mr. Babachir Lawal and the ex-speaker of the House of Representatives Yakubu Dogram may quit the ruling APC opposing the Muslim-Muslim ticket.

Opposing the M/M ticket they vowed to mobilize the Northern Christian to reject TINUBU/SHETTIMA joint ticket. They declared that it is not a personal opinion. It is a demand of the Nigerian nation. The nation is demanding free, fair, and equitable representation. Muslim-Muslim ticket would not guarantee peace. This is a clear threat to destroy peace of the nation, if only Muslims become the rulers. Christians of Nigeria are so aggressive that they do not mind posing threat to peace and tranquility of the nation if their political designs are not fulfilled.

Besides the threat from Christian Community, BOLA TINUBU has been facing internal rifts and rivalry among his party members. TINUBU cannot be assured of the support from Buhari administration. Yet Buhari as a democratic member of the APC in all probability will vote for the APC candidate. Religious enmity has been echoed by the Christian leaders when some of them declared that TINUBU and Atiku cannot lead Nigeria peacefully. It is a clear indication that they do not want a Muslim ruler. Church in Nigeria is passionate. It opposes same faith ticket. (Henry Umoru, 2022)

The hatred of Christian community against Muslim rule is so vivid in Nigerian media that no Christian feels shy in uttering nonsense in political dialogue. One Mr. DELE FAROTIMI openly expressed his religious-tribal feelings when he declared, “If TINUBU succeeds BUHARI, I will proceed on an exile and renounce my (Nigerian) citizenship.

The Federation of Nigeria is composed of three distinct branches, legislative, executive and judiciary. The principle of federalism is enshrined in the Constitution. Out of existing (six) political zones, a candidate for Presidency must win at least four zones. This is an explanation of the required two third majority votes for a candidate to win.

Alhaji Mauzu Bawa Rijau assured the media that discontent within the party i.e. APC will be put to rest before the presidential election. Alhaji Mauzu is the Vice Chairman of the North Central of APC. One positive voice about the outcome of the Presidential election came from the Vice- Presidential candidate of the PDP. The candidate is the governor of Delta state. He said, "I don't believe that Muslim-Muslim ticket means North- North Ticket. Another challenge against the popularity of APC is the emergence of the Labor Party. Mr. Peter Obi has declared himself as the candidate for Presidency from Labor Party. He is confident that he will defeat his rivals from both principal parties.

The newspaper (PUNCH, 2022) published an article, portrays anti North and anti-Muslim feelings. The articles published, the political comments made, the surveys conducted in social and economic fields, breaking hot news in this newspaper clearly indicate pro-South and pro Christian policy statements. The contents of the article, as published in the newspaper are summarized below.

The controversy (present presidential campaign) took the form of ethnic chauvinism, acrimony and distrust, tribal, regional and religious narratives. The North wants to retain political power based on the population actively involved in the electoral process. Three political zones in the North command 56 % of votes. Three political zones of the south have 44% of votes. In these circumstances, Nigeria finds herself between the devil and the deep blue sea. (Mr.Ekiye, 2022) Since the writer is the U.S. educated Christian of Nigerian origin, he expressed his religious sentiments in the following words," Christians have enlightened mind democratic and patriotic."

Mr. Ekiye criticized the present Constitution as a hastily, fraudulently crafted document. The Constitution satisfied no one except the military regime. The present milieu and domain of Nigeria is marred by tribalism, religiosity and ethnic elements.

Retired General Ibrahim Babangida who had overthrown the regime the military ruler Muhammadu Buhari in 1985 ruled Nigeria up to 1993. In early 1986 Babangida set up Cooky Commission and mandated it to design a new political and social order. On June 12, 1993, Baban Gidda annulled the presidential election in which M.K.Abiola (A YORBA Citizen) was declared winner. Later on in a television program, Baban Gida explained the reasons as to why he had annulled the election. He said if he had not annulled the elections there would have been a coup which could have been bloodier than one would think. By annulment of election a Yorba was denied Presidency. But in the next Presidential election 1999 retired general Obasanjo, a Yorba, was given the opportunity to become the President of the country. General Obasanjo ruled the country from February 1976 to 1979 as a military ruler. Baban Gida stepped

down on 25th August 1993. The General, as it is generally believed, who toppled Babangida was General SANI ABACHA.

The parliamentary system in the First republic 1960-66 was the BRITISH LEGACY. The military rule was the consequence of North- South regional rivalry. The Civil War which emerged after the first military coup was the water shed in the history of Nigeria. There was a huge change in the domestic political structure. With the establishment of twelve states, the hegemony of the northern region was abolished with regionalism.

Subsequent military rulers e.g., Muritala Muhammad and Obasanjo further divided the states into nineteen states. The parliamentary system was abrogated, and a new Presidential system was introduced and then military rulers abolished 12 states structure. They divided the country into nineteen states. Regionalism was abolished. The hegemony of the North was wiped out. General Obasanjo handed over the power to the new elected Civilian President Alhaji Shehu Usman Shagari. The Second Republic was short lived. Alhaji Shehu Shagari was the only President during the Second Republic before he was overthrown by a new coup headed by Major General Muhammadu Buhari in 1984. The military administration of Muhammadu Buhari was an offshoot of the administration of General Muritala Muhammad as he himself admitted in a press conference.

Retired General and the incumbent President Muhammadu Buhari celebrated June 12 as a Democracy Day in memory of Mashood Abiola the assumed winner of 1993 presidential election. The then military ruler General Babangida stepped down in August 1993. For a brief period, a civilian Earnest Shonekan became the president of the country. Power was transferred to general Sani Abacha who ruled the country for five years before he mysteriously died in 1998.

Former President Goodluck Jonathan honored General Abacha as one of the greatest heroes in Nigeria. President Buhari credited ABACHA for building roads and improving education and health care. Abacha set up a Constitutional Conference. He is described as a good economic manager. In the Foreign Policy arena, he was instrumental to bring peace in Sierra Leone and Liberia.

In reply to an allegation posed by an Igbo political critic that Nigerian Leaders have always ignored the Igbo Community in reposing political power in the country. He alleged that Northern Hausa-Fulani and the Yorba community in the Western region have always connived at snatching political power and retaining it for their social and political glory. An enlightened, educated and fair-minded Western Region analyst enunciated his feelings as follows:

Today we must learn to work together to build a nation rather than always wanting to dominate the others. Every Nigerian government made lots of efforts to mend old wounds. Why is that, everything is just never enough for some Igbos (or other group of people). If it is the Presidency that worries them then there are many parties as platform for anybody to emerge. (Omeiza Ajayi, 2017)

Since January 1966 military coup, Nigeria has been in turmoil. The Civil War that ensued in the aftermath of bloody coup, became the watershed in the history of Nigeria. The coup of 1966 was a frightening tale of bloodshed.

Both the leading contenders visited the influential and powerful Western countries particularly Great Britain and the United States. The visits seem to be an election strategy for both of them. One wonders what the strategy could be. May be, it is speculated that the purpose of the visit was to solicit the sympathy, support of the ruling elite in both countries. What could be the impact factor that is solicited. It is anybody's guess. To gain approval, favor and assistance for the future incoming official policies, as and when the solicitor comes to power. A friendly, sympathetic, and pro-West foreign policy will be the target that the above two countries would like to achieve. This assertion is reflected in the visit of Atiku Abubakar of the United States. The presidential candidate of Peoples Democratic Party, Atiku Abubakar flew out of Nigeria to the United States on 25th October as part of his bid to realize his ambition of taking over from President Muhammad Buhari in 2023.

According to reports, while in the US, Atiku and his team will engage in lobby of top American officials, including influential members of Congress to solicit support for his presidential bid. So did Bola Tinubu when he visited the United Kingdom in his early days of electioneering campaign. The important question is, do the Nigerians really believe that visits will definitely produce significant results in the election campaign. If it is believed, then it is obvious that Nigerian elections are not free or impartial. An observer will then declare that foreign interference has an impact factor on Nigerian elections.

Conclusion

After four decades of trials and tribulations, Nigeria is now able to Present herself as a shining example of Democracy in an organized and articulated manner. General public knows that they will exercise their democratic right by voting for the new President, almost a year before the actual election takes place. The election date for President, vice-President, members of the Senate and the House of Representative has been fixed for 25th February 2023.

According to the schedule announced by the Independent Election Commission, State elections will be held two weeks after the Presidential Election i.e. on eleventh March, 2023. The winners

will be inaugurated on 29th May 2023. This is the day which has been declared as DEMOCRACY DAY.

The former governor of Lagos, BOLA TINUBU easily secured the candidacy of the ruling Party All Progressive Congress with the support of key figures that will back him in his race for President in February 2023. (Nigeria Politics, 2022)

The competition is between the two rival parties i.e., APC and PDP. The other party which has sprung its face for the time being on the political face of the country, is the Labor Party. Despite exorbitant media coverage for its activities and policy statement, the labor Party is not likely to emerge victorious. Christians in Nigeria are unable to digest the Muslim-Muslim ticket. They fear Islamization of Nigeria. They desire that President ship should rotate between Muslims and Christians. This is how they can assuage the frightening news of Nigeria becoming a Muslim country.

APC (All Progressive Congress) seems to be the largest political party. It commands the sympathy of the largest number of people particularly in the former Northern region. President Buhari, who is the former military general belongs to this party. The current President is a magnanimous leader. He is abstaining himself from exerting any administrative or political influence in the election campaign of Bola Tinubu. Mr. Tinubu is a Muslim from the South zone while his wife is a Christian. He has chosen former BORNO state governor Mallam KASHIM SHETTIMA from Northern zone as his running mate (Vice President) for 2023 presidential election.

The winner, whoever he may be, must face many problems on the domestic front. Some of them include mounting insecurity, a wave of kidnapping, high unemployment, inflation, ethnic violence, and low economic growth. People are still agitating for the creation of more states.

In order to win the presidency, a candidate, according to the Constitution of Nigeria, has to secure plurality of votes, in addition to it, he must have secured not less than 25% of the total votes cast in at least 24 states out of 36 states. So, he must fulfil two conditions, one plurality of votes, the other is twenty-five per cent of votes in not less than two thirds of the states. The candidate elected after meeting these requirements must really be a popular leader. Such a leader belonging to the most populous country of Africa, can righteously claim to be the Leader of Africa.

Religious enmity has been echoed by the Christian leaders when some of them declared that TINUBU and Atiku cannot lead Nigeria peacefully. It is a clear indication that they do not want a Muslim ruler. Church in Nigeria is passionate. It opposes same faith ticket.

APC candidate BOLA TINUBU replying to allegation against him that he has relied on support from the North which may be erroneous or deceitful for his campaign. Resultantly the unity of Nigeria may be threatened. He emphatically defended his choice. He declared: -

The North proved to me Nigeria can survive its unity. Some people wanted President Muhammadu Buhari to announce someone, but the President said no.

He insisted the process must go on democratically. The President said that anyone that would mess up the APC process would see his other side. He remained upright to the end. The candidate from APC Tinubu said that he has the support of the Northern leaders of his party. He said: - 'Northern APC Governors resolved that the presidency must go to the South and, especially, South West. Governors Nasir El-Rufai, Abdullahi Gan Duje and others supported me to the end.

Having taken cognizance of his commendable antecedents as Lagos State Governor and his demonstrated ability in building physical and human capital, the Yoruba leaders are in no doubt that Asiwaju Ahmed Bola Tinubu as President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria offers the best opportunity to produce a government of that will usher in a new Era of hope, peace, security, harmony, gainful employment for the multitude, economic development, social and political stability. (Sunday Times, 2022)

Kano is one of the very active Northern States in the field of election. Nigerian media has started showing its interest in the political viability of Kano State by using such phrase as KANO STATE SHAPING. Former state governor Rabio Kwan kwoso has declared his candidacy from the plate form of New Nigerian Peoples Party. Kwankwoso picked up one Idahosa as his running mate. (Luis Tato, 2022)

Labor Party leader Mr. OBI selected Baba Datti Ahmad, who hails from Kano State, which is famous for producing human power, as his running mate. With the general election approaching, a fierce battle is raging between the traditional parties (the APC and PDP) and the outsider NNPP over the strategic northern state of Kano. The outcome is likely to decide the election at the national level. (REUTER, 2022)

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