**NIGERIAN STATE AND THE CHALLENGES OF ELECTION: A CRITICAL REVIEW**

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 **ABSTRACT**

*The recent signing of the electoral act into law gave Nigerians hope of free, fair and transparent elections. This is as the electoral act not only mandated the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to conduct elections via electronic voting machines but to transmit election results from the polling units via electronic machines. This led Nigerian INEC to introduce Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) machines. This innovation was enthusiastically welcomed by the Nigerian voters as effective means of reducing human meddling with the electoral results. Despite the enthusiasm surrounding this electoral innovation, Nigerian elections as witnessed in February 25 and March 18, 2023 became fraught with greater challenges. These are the challenges of violence and thuggery, INEC partisanship, purposely negligence, disenfranchisement of voters, glitches and poor logistics. This paper analytically reviews these conspicuous challenges persistent in Nigerian elections. With these challenges glaring in the 2023 general elections, the study also examines the legitimacy of Nigerian electoral outcomes characterized by irregularities, voter disenfranchisement, malpractices and riggings. The study then finds that the Nigerian peoples’ exercise of their franchise in their yearning for a new and better Nigeria is thwarted by politicians and cabal who subvert the popular sovereign will of the people by causing violence at the polling units and manipulating electoral results to their own advantage. Sadly, at the centre of these anti-democratic practices is INEC which appears to have compromised the 2023 general elections through its neglect of the constitution, electoral act and her own election guidelines. This paper therefore notes that gross voter apathy may characterize subsequent Nigerian elections while subsequent governments would lack legitimacy as long as INEC appears partisan, dependent and negligent of its statutory responsibility of conducting inclusive, free, fair and transparent elections in the country.*

**Keywords: Election, Challenges, Critical Review, INEC, Nigeria.**

**Introduction**

Globally, election is one of the essential parts of democracy. It is one of the democratic means through which nation States demonstrate their democracy. Election is therefore a means through which eligible voters in a country participate actively in politics. Signaling representative democracy, election serves as the platform through which the opinions of the citizenry count in the choice of their leaders. As such, “election expresses the generality of citizenry opinion on who represents them in government and who carries their mantle of leadership” (Chinweuba & Ezeugwu, 2022: 32). These point to elections as potent instruments of change in democratic States, as well as an effective mechanism for selecting and disciplining leaders in true democratic states (Ezirim, Ohiaegu & Chukwu, 2011). These lofty democratic characters however appear nonexistent in Nigeria State due to many persistent challenges revolving around the transparency of elections. Despite media orientations and political mobilisations as well as the masses’ massive acquisition of Permanent Voters’ Cards (PVC) and participation in elections, the 2023 general elections has proven again the persistence of the challenges of elections in Nigerian State. These challenges range from INEC’s alleged partisanship, negligence, glitches, poor logistic, irregularities, riggings, manipulations, malpractices, to disenfranchisement of voters. These are punctuated by thuggery, “god fatherism”, violence and riggings perpetuated by politicians and the ruling party at the stronghold of their opponents and in some other polling units. These subversions of voters’ will (democracy) indeed reflect Nigerian elections as spectre that should no longer be ignored in national discourse.

Considering the events of 2023 general elections, it appears Nigerian government and Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) does not want to give the masses an inclusive, transparent, credible, free and fair elections. This is owing to the alleged collusion of the Presidency, INEC with the ruling All Progressive Congress (APC) in the just concluded elections. This bad gesture indeed appears to refute the place of true democracy in Nigerian State. But, what is souring Nigerian leadership in elections that make them subvert the peoples’ will? Could be it that those in government are not actually doing well and are afraid of being voted out of office? Could it be that Nigerian government and INEC are truly incapable of conducting credible elections in the country? Could it also be that Nigerian leadership do not truly want the country to be democratic, hence the negligence of the persistent challenges encompassing Nigerian general elections? Given the reality of the persistence of the challenges of elections in Nigerian milieu, are outcomes of Nigerian elections legitimate?

Boosted by the signing of electoral act into law, Nigerian people thought the epoch of the manipulation of elections are over. This thought seemed real as the electoral act mandated INEC to conduct elections through electronic machines and transmit election results from polling units via electronic machines. Thus, INEC came up with the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) electronic machines through which it intended to transmit results from the polling units across the country to the collation centre. The public hope also became high as INEC 2023 guideline stated that 2023 election results from the polling units would via BVAS be transmitted to the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) portal where the citizenry can see the results as they come. This guideline remained mere words as INEC abandoned it and even reclined to manufacturing results that led to the declaration of the President-elect; Senator Bola Ahmed Asiwaju Tinubu. The proof of this however lies in the manipulative discrepancies between the figures at the polling units, in INEC sever (as was later uploaded through the BVAS machine) and at the INEC general collation centre.

Worst-still, the presidential election results at the polling units via BVAS machines only started trickling into the INEC server and IReV after the President-elect has been declared and public opinion was against the declaration. With popular sovereign will of the people vitiated, the earlier public mistrust and non confidence in INEC conducting transparent and credible elections became manifest. This non confidence in INEC was according to Odey (2003) the effect of long term “political perfidy” and “political charade” of successive Nigerian electoral institutions and government (42). This poor situation indeed calls for salvaging Nigerian electoral process through making INEC stand to its constitutional duties of conducting inclusive, free and fair elections that will again assure Nigerian people that voting is worth doing.

**Understanding the Concept of Election**

At the centre of true democratic process is election. Election has to do with people’s exercise of their franchise or rights to vote. Election is therefore a political process through which the popular will of the people is realised. As such, election stands as an avenue through which eligible voters select their leaders and representatives in government on behalf of the rest of the members of the State. “Since the elected officials function as peoples’ representatives, election is an avenue through which peoples’ views and opinions count in governance” (Chinweuba & Ezeugwu, 2022:34). Thus, the people participate in the governance of their society through the representatives that got their maximum votes in the election.

As the hallmark of democracy, election is also a channel for peaceful change of government. Since election yields the popular and sovereign will of the people, it is as well understood as the exercise that confers political legitimacy on the elected and government (Ashindorbe, 2018). Viewed from these vintages, election remains the “conveyor or channel through which democracy and its dividends are actualised or concretised” (Ezeugwu & Obiora, 2007: 74).

**Provenance of the Challenges of Elections in Nigeria**

The challenges of elections in Nigeria began in colonial epoch when state actors merely allowed minimal transparency and participation of the masses in electoral processes. Reacting to this, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe made a complaint to the British Secretary of State for the Colonies and requested his intervention and insistence on masses’ inclusive and transparent elections in Nigeria (Nnoli, 1980). In negligence of this plea, the 1959 general election was fraught by figure manipulations, massive riggings and violence. Ezeugwu & Obiora (2007) allege that this non transparent election was not an oversight but a conscious and purposeful “colonial policy of divide and rule” (75). The further aim of the colonists was also to ensure a culture of rigging in which election would remain a divisive factor in Nigerian State. Thus, post independence election in Nigeria was marred by massive riggings and violence leading to the first military *coup d’etat* against the civilian government of Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa in January 1966, in which the military took over the mantle of leadership. The 1979 general election that brought Alhaji Shehu Shegari to power however became fraught with electoral manipulations and riggings. This sham of election continued in 1983 leading the military again to strike against a constitutional government and take over the reins of leadership.

The challenges of elections in Nigeria however became cemented with the return to democratic rule in 1999. Then, the country experienced one of the worst elections highly manipulated by the military in which former General Olusegun Obasanjo was brought to power. Since then, elections have geometrically been fraught with riggings, manipulations and violence.

**Nigerian State and the Challenges of Elections**

Over the years, successive Nigerian governments have refused to set up a truly independent electoral commission, sound and hitch-free electoral system. It was just prior to 2023 general elections that the electoral acts and use of electronic voting system that in many places render general elections transparent, free and fair were signed into law. Yet, the implementation of this electoral act in February 25, 2023 presidential election fall short of public expectation. This is as the use of electoral voting machines as required by the electoral act was jettisoned by INEC amidst the collation of results. This is coupled with INEC’s purposeful neglect of its own guidelines in its unlawful chaotic hurry to collate election results and declare the winner. This has exposed glaring manipulation of electoral processes and election results by INEC to the advantage of the ruling APC. It was following public outcry at the hasty and unlawful declaration of the President-elect that INEC eventually uploaded some of the election results from the polling centres to their server and IReV. Yet, many who viewed these results allege that some of the figures announced by INEC neither tallied with the ones eventually uploaded neither in INEC’s server and IReV nor with the signed results at the polling centres by INEC officials and party agents. The gubernatorial elections held on March 18, 2023 also bore similar characteristics plus the fact that INEC in many States came up with figures from polling units where elections never held. Thus, the 2023 general elections only proved again that Nigerian elections are sham and charade that has never met the minimum requirement of liberal democratic culture (Ezeugwu & Obiora, 2007).

Electoral challenges also emanate from Nigerian socio-cultural systems which encourage group boundaries in religion and ethnicity; thereby building tribe-people rather than national patriots out of Nigerian people. According to Chinweuba and Ezeugwu,

Tribe-people in this context consider elections from the point of view of its benefits to their tribe. With this cultural orientation amidst inadequate political information and voter education offered by successive governments, citizenry participation in Nigerian general elections is largely influenced by religious, tribal and ethnic considerations and not national patriotism nor need for nation building. Based on this, many Nigerians tend to participate in elections when a contesting candidate is from their ethnic nationality, zone or religious affiliation (37).

As seen in 2023 presidential elections, this challenge conversely underscores electoral malpractices and manipulations in the country. For based on tribal orientations, tribal bigots in INEC and other strategic positions are bent on rigging elections for their tribal candidates.

Besides, many electoral candidates in Nigeria are not service driven, but driven by financial and economic motives. For these unpopular candidates, winning election is an unhindered access to capital accumulation from public treasury and for joining the capitalist class. These intents not only propel many Nigerian politicians’ desperation to win elections at all cost, but make elections a do or die affair. As such, these politicians heat up the electoral periods, processes, and indulge in all manner of electoral fraud; vote buying, thuggery, ballot box snatching, physical intimidation, manipulations, violence and rigging at the party and national levels in order to emerge victorious. With all these, the Nigerian people hardly decide their leaders and representatives as general election results are not always the will of the masses but those of the cabals.

Also at the root of election challenges in Nigeria is the paradoxical independence of the INEC. This paradox has become more glaring with the alleged 2023 general election results in which it was alleged that INEC manipulatively subverted the will of the people. Because this manipulation is totally against the political imagination and expectation of the large population, it would have engendered violence in the country if not for the media broadcast of the Labour Party (LP) Presidential candidate Mr. Peter Gregory Obi who called for calm and promised to get his stolen mandate back through the court.

Indeed, INEC was instituted as an independent, neutral and transparent umpire for Nigerian elections. Yet, there is no indication that INEC differs significantly with its predecessors; Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) and National Electoral Commission (NEC). This is as INEC’s trumpeted neutrality and independence are but mere words. Consequently, INEC takes directives from the presidency and executive arm of government (Awa, 1993). INEC depends on the presidency and executive arm of government for funding, logistics, security, etc. In these ways, INEC like its predecessors is vulnerable to Government’s influence and control. As such, “the power of incumbency will always prevail” on the INEC in almost all Nigerian elections” ([Umana](https://researchcyber.com/author/ifiokobong/%22%20%5Co%20%22Posts%20by%20Kubiat%20Umana), 2018:2). This has made Nigerian voters to view elections in the country as mere fulfillment.

The challenges posed by INEC to Nigerian elections are also visible in the repulsive behaviours of some of its staff. These Staff from the beginning make it difficult to register voters and to issue PVC to registered voters in some parts of the country. Some of them even harass voters at the polls while some try to thwart the scores of some candidates at the polls where they are serving. This was the case in one of the polling units at Abakpa Nike area of Enugu State where the INEC *ad hoc* staff who happened to be a youth copper tried to add the presidential scores of the Labour Party (LP) candidate Mr. Gregory Peter Obi to that of the New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP) candidate Mr. Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso. These actions have indeed become hindering memory in the psyche of many Nigerian people. With all these, many Nigerian people have lost confidence in the results of the elections conducted by INEC. This non confidence predicates also on the masses’ conviction that in the elections conducted by INEC and her staff, the people’s votes do actually count. As such, majority of Nigerian people believes that Nigerian elections have been rigged with their results already printed even before it is conducted.

Amidst these, international observers estimated that in 1999 presidential election in many Nigerian States, “less than 10% of registered voters cast their ballots but official documented turnout rates for those same States exceeded 85%” (Ezeajughu, 2021:193). In 2023 presidential elections, the international observers came up with similar reports of non transparency and manipulation of election figures by INEC and its collusion with the ruling APC presidential candidate Senator Bola Ahmed Tinubu. Similar report of INEC and Government complicity coming from the head of European Union (EU) election observing mission in Nigeria, Max Van den Berg (2007) states,

the 2007 State and Federal elections fell short of basic international and regional standards for domestic elections. They were marred by very poor organisation. Lack of essential transparency essential evidence offraud, widespread voting disenfranchisement at different stages of the process, lack of equal opportunities for political parties and candidates and numerous incidents violence. As a result the process cannot be said to have been credible (5).

Challenging elections in Nigeria is also the militarisation of peoples’ psyche by Nigerian government. Prior to 2023 elections for instance, President Muhammadu Buhari openly ordered the law enforcement agents to shoot at sight any assailant to the ballot boxes. The Deputy Inspector General of Police (DIG) South-east zone John Amadi was also quoted by Channels TV news of Friday March 17, 2023 as saying that whoever prepares to disturb elections on March 18, 2023 should be ready to die. The people interpret these utterances as encouraging trigger-happy-security agents to kill innocent voters and label them ballot box snatchers. This is as such utterances leave the determination of election offenders on the hands of the security agents and no longer on the hands of the competent court of law. Yet to the surprise of many voters, who trouped out *en masse* to vote because they wanted positive change in the country, some security agents ignored their duties at the polls, some colluded with thugs in scaring, intimidating innocent voters and even in preventing some perceived voters of the opponent of their preferred candidate from voting in polling units allocated to them.

There were indeed many cases in which the ruling APC party thugs invaded polling units, attacked or intimidated voters whom they perceived were voting for the opposition Labour Party (LP) in many places in Lagos and Rivers States at the full glare of some men of the Security Forces. The Arise television news of February 26 and March 19 gave credence to this; airing that their crew was even attacked by suspected APC thugs during the governorship election of March 18, 2023 as they try to cover the electoral happenings in the polling unit at the palace of Elegushi, Lagos State. Similarly, the team of the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) was attacked; beaten up and injured in one of the polling centres in the north as they try to arrest some vote buyers. Some voters were also barred by suspected APC party thugs from coming in to vote in their polling units based on their tribe. A typical instance here was in the Channels and Arise television news of February 25, 2023 presidential election where Igbo Nigerian voters were largely prevented from entering their polling units in many parts of Lagos State especially in Lagos State University (LASU) polling units out of fear they may cast their ballots for the LP presidential candidate Mr. Peter Gregory Obi. The social media was indeed aflame with similar incidents in Iba housing estate of Lagos and other places in Lagos State where Igbo and non Yoruba voters were locked out from participating in presidential and gubernatorial elections.

According to Arise television news of March 19, 2023, there were serious thuggery, violence, shootings and disruption of voting processes in Surulere, Isolo, Ojo, Eti-Osa, etc local Governments of Lagos State during the March 18 2023 governorship election while many were feared killed in some polling units in Bayelsa and Rivers States that appeared like war zones. Prior to these, attack and killing of voters by party thugs during February 25, 2023 presidential and National Assembly elections happened at Ubomini, Emohua local Government, etc., of Rivers State while similar attack injured and dispersed many voters in Ikate in Lekki, Oshodi, Surulere, etc., of Lagos State. Indeed, the European Union (EU) mission to Nigeria were reported in Channels and Arise television news to have documented that at least twenty one (21) persons were killed during Nigerian 2023 elections. These were coupled with the stealing of BVAS machines, burning and carting away of electoral materials in many States of the federation. These attacks were however aside from those of INEC that consisted in purposeful disenfranchisement of voters. This disenfranchisement was a reality at Township School, Tafawa road in Jos, Plateau State which was an LP stronghold. Generally therefore, insecurity as seen in the 2023 general election has become an outstanding challenge that marred elections in many polling units across Nigerian State. Apart from the insecurity posed by party thugs, extremist groups like *Boko Haram* also disturbed elections. This was a case in 2023 presidential elections in some parts of the north where it was reported that some voters were even abducted.

**INEC and the Challenges of Elections in Nigerian State**

At the centre of the challenges of elections in Nigeria is INEC. This is why since Nigerian transition to democratic rule in 1999, non confidence of the masses on the INEC has been glaring. As the conducts of elections by INEC geometrically wanes, the masses confidence in Nigerian polity is also declining. The poor conduct of elections by INEC begins with its negligence of adequate voter registration and prompt issuance of PVC in many parts of the country. Consequently, millions of eligible voters are not always registered within the INEC limited time frame. Worst still, millions of people’s PVCs remain packed at INEC offices and designated centres in many parts of Nigeria. This is due to either INEC’s inefficiency in distributing them or their poor sensitization of the public on the need to collect their PVCs. This also explains why many polling units had less expected voters in the just concluded 2023 general elections and even in other elections.

Besides, many eligible voters issued with PVCs by INEC do not find their names on the voters’ registers in their allocated polling units during the accreditation exercise. Sequels to this, many eligible voters were disenfranchised from performing their civic duties of casting their ballots even in the last 2023 general elections. Apart from this, it has been alleged that the present INEC registered, issued PVCs and accredited underage individuals in the just concluded February 25, 2023 elections in the northern state of Kano. This report was also aired by the Channels television news of February 25, 2023. Apart from this, there has been an open neglect of the electoral acts and guidelines that stipulate the use of electronic machines (BVAS) in conducting and transmitting election results by the INEC. Worst still, the presidential election results were not transmitted from the polling units into the INEC’s server and IReV as INEC guideline stipulated. Rather, some of the presidential election results were uploaded days after the purported winner has been declared following public outcry of INEC’S manipulation of results in favour of the ruling APC. This not new but age-long collusion was why Akubue (2010) maintains that in Nigeria “election results are decided and determined even before the actual election” (35). The persistent manipulation of electoral results in Nigeria by INEC as well as INEC’s collusion with the ruling party to manipulate election results give credence to the assertions of Chinweuba and Ezeugwu (2022) that;

 Spectre of elections in Nigerian state also manifests on

 their manipulations by the incumbent, “godfathers” and

 their loyalists. The manipulated victory in this context is

 often secured through the weapons of the power of

 incumbency, wealth and violence. Based on this, election

 victory in Nigeria is not always the popular will. It rather

 belongs to the candidates who have the wherewithal to

 take it by hook or crook (35-36).

Although tailored to reflect true democracy, the Nigerian INEC as an institution remains a challenge to Nigerian elections. This is as it has openly shown it can abandon the electoral laws and its own electoral guidelines midway within an election. This is as it has openly shown it can be partisan and loyal to the ruling party or only candidate(s) endowed with violence and wealth through the just concluded 2023 presidential elections. Based on this, the Minister of Transport, Chibuike Rotimi Amechi at the Arise television of Sunday March 19, 2023 calls 2023 Nigerian election as a context between INEC, Police and opposition political parties. Being the climax of INEC’s worst conducted elections, it means the 2023 general election did not bring the desired anticipated leadership change to Nigerians. Rather, it was a mere ploy to bring people to the polls in order

 to deceive the world that election happened and winners

 are products of popular will. For in the polling centres are

 undemocratic practises like vote buying, multiple thumb

 printing, thuggery, ballot box snatching and manipulation

 of results. These subvert the peoples’ will as well as their

 fundamental longing for a better candidate to emerge as

 winner of the polls (36).

**The Dangers of the Challenges of Election in Nigerian State**

The challenges of electoral process in Nigeria lead to the emergence of illegitimate winners. This is as the challenges make election a do-or-die affair in which only the violent and wealthy candidate with the wherewithal takes the victory by force. In this sense, the challenges of election leave the choice of leadership on the hands of cabals, party faithful, thugs, corrupt INEC staff and enemies of democracy. These take advantage of the challenges surrounding the electoral process in manipulating the polls to the emergence of military fashioned feudalists, tyrants, dupes and frauds as leaders (Kukah, 2009). According to Chinweuba and Ezeugwu,

 these are the kind of leaders that foster poor governance,

 corruption, waste of national resources, collapse of public

 utilities, abuse of human right and rule of law. Such

 leaders neglect their manifestoes; electioneering promises

 and ignores even the peoples’ strongly held opinion (40).

The reality of such leaders who were products of the challenges of elections in Nigeria is why the country had not made significant progress since return to democratic rule.

The danger of the challenges of election in Nigeria lies in those challenges becoming part of Nigerian election character and culture. If those challenges are therefore allowed to continue, then the present notion of many Nigerian politicians that they can acquire political power without the voters will deepen. Presently, these politicians view the masses that constitute the voters as worthless and dispensable; hence while in offices they deny these masses even the simple welfare and dividend that characterize worst democracies.

The challenges of election in Nigeria are of course questioning and eroding Nigerian values, image and humanity. This is as it has come to a stage where some people are profiled; prevented from voting, chased away from their polling units with dogs, cutlass, clubs, etc, and treated in a less human way because they came from a particular section of the country. Thus, there is now a deepened poor perception of Nigeria and Nigerians outside the shores of the country. These challenges may of course lead to military intervention as was the case in the first republic.

**Legitimacy of Nigerian Elections and Outcomes**

The legitimacy of Nigerian elections and its outcomes is clearly stated by the law establishing and guiding it. The Nigerian constitution and recently electoral acts are clear on elections as regards its qualities; inclusiveness, transparency, credibility, free and fairness. This means that Nigerian election is legitimate when it is backed by the law and when it is conducted in accordance with the law. In a civil and democratic Nigeria, the constitutional back up and transparency, active voter participation, free and fairness of election stand as evidences of its legitimacy. These factors also confer legitimacy on the elected or products of elections. Such electoral outcomes are regarded as the popular and sovereign will of the people. Because these democratic ingredients are lacking in Nigerian elections, it means that Nigerian elections and their outcomes lack political legitimacy. As such, government formed from the crooked outcomes of such elections remains illegitimate; “for nobody can legitimately govern a civil society from non transparent, unfair and rigged elections” (Chinweuba & Ezeugwu, 2022:41).

**Challenges of conducting credible Elections in Nigeria**

Nigerian State is built on a faulty constitution. This was the constitution that was hurriedly crafted by the military regime of General Abdulsami Abubakar as the country moved into democratic governance in 1999. This constitution overpowers the executive arm of government making this arm felt in almost every sector of Nigerian society. As such, it is basically difficult for Nigerian INEC to be independent, and to independently conduct a transparent and credible election as the executive arm of government has constitutional influence on it. It is based on this faulty constitution that the INEC is not also financially self-reliant. The Nigerian Federal executive arm of government therefore oversees INEC’s budget, funds it, provides the institution’s other needs like logistics, security, and consequently limits its autonomy and retains its vulnerability to control. This means that until the constitutional powers of the executive arm of government over INEC are curbed; the electoral institution will remain a puppet and unable to conduct a neutral and uninfluenced election.

Conducting free and fair elections in Nigeria is also hindered by the general unpatriotism in the country. This unpatriotism is underscored by the tribal and ethnic politics in the country, which has over the years entrenched citizens’ loyalty to their tribe rather than the Nigerian State. This tribal and ethnic orientation has on election periods subdued patriotism to Nigerian State. Thus, what inform the decision of many Nigerian voters on every election period are often not the quality but the tribe and ethnicity of the candidates. Against this poor orientation, Gyekye (1997) suggests that “people will have to be weaned from the influences of commune-cultural loyalties that obscure and subvert devotion and commitment to the national political community” (9).

Moreover, the Nigerian political offices are very lucrative. According to Forsyth (1982), having these political offices

 means success and prosperity, not only for the man

 who holds it but for his family, his birth place and even

 his region of origin. As a result, there are many who

 will go any length to get it, will surpass themselves in

 order to get it (15).

The juicy nature of these offices would of course continue to hamper free and fair elections. This is as they will continue to inspire non service driven candidates into contesting elections and occupying political offices through all manner of electoral malpractices. It will even be unfeasible to expect those who occupied political offices through electoral malpractices to ensure transparent, free and fair elections in the country.

**Towards resolving the Challenges of Elections in Nigerian State**

Nigerian elections are not short of laws and guidelines expected to ensure its transparency and credibility. Its lack is an honest Government that will ensure the true independence and credibility of the INEC. Only with such leaders would electoral malpractices and irregularities be largely reduced in Nigerian elections. To curb the challenges of Nigerian elections therefore, there is great need for pragmatic and patriotic candidates to hold power. This is important as it is only pragmatic patriots that can really guarantee enabling environment that ensures transparent elections. Getting such pragmatic patriots into power would in the first place warrant open revolution. Great thinkers like John Locke envisaged this option as the best resort for the citizenry since corrupt leaders will never relinquish power freely for the qualitative candidate that will ensure credible elections to take over (Thomas, 2009).

There can hardly be transparent, free and fair elections in Nigeria without the curbing of violence and insecurity around the polling units. Since this is the job of the law enforcement agents which they are yet to do satisfactorily, curbing of violence and insecurity at the polling units calls for the re-education and retraining of the law enforcement agents on their roles during elections. This will ensure a modern effective policing, safeguarding and combating of the security challenges of elections in the country. This will also foster the law enforcement’s understanding and appreciation of democracy, and even make them democratic in their engagements.

Also central in resolving election challenges in Nigeria is the institution of “electoral task force (ETF) to monitor and report culprits of electoral malpractises and violence for investigation and prosecution” (Chinweuba & Ezeugwu, 2022:45). This investigation and prosecution should be championed by a committee of inquiry established by law but replete with people with proven character. These would see to the prosecution and punishment of the culprits of electoral malpractises and violence. The reports of the ETF and committee of inquiry should be further handled by independent justice tribunals (IJT) whose verdicts would serve as a deterrent to election malpractice and violence. This will largely strengthen the rule of law, electoral acts, peaceful and fair electoral process in the country.

Indeed, many of the challenges facing elections in Nigeria would be reduced through the true autonomy of INEC. This autonomy would come when INEC is re-established in a way it can self-reliantly fund elections and carter for election logistics independent of all arms of Government. Along this lane, Nigerian lawmakers should work towards strengthening the autonomy of the INEC by removing the power of appointing INEC chairman and electoral commissioners from the executive arm of Government. This power can be reposed on Nigerian judiciary council (NJC) to ensure INEC’s neutrality, integrity and comportment during elections.

**Conclusion**

This paper investigated the challenges surrounding elections in Nigerian State. At the centre of the challenges is INEC. This is because of the compromised positions the institution takes which became more pronounced in the just concluded 2023 general elections. Along with this sham election were avalanche of irregularities, malpractices and violence at the election polls and collation centres. These question the legitimacy of Nigerian elections and the winners of such elections. Until INEC becomes truly autonomous and independent, Nigerian elections would remain unpopular and below minimum standard of electoral culture, and its outcome would never qualify as popular sovereign will of the people.

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