

THE ROLE OF SECURITY FORCES IN ENSURING TRANSPARENT AND CREDIBLE ELECTION IN NIGERIA: A CASE STUDY OF EKITI STATE 2014 GUBERNATORIAL ELECTION

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ABSTRACT

The essence of democracy is the provision of free and fair election occasioned by adequate, reliable and informed security apparatus. Various elections have taken place in Nigeria in the past, the Ekiti State Gubernatorial Election of June 21st, 2014 calls for assessment and perusal by the academia and policy makers. This study investigates the factors behind the conduct of the gubernatorial election of Ekiti State held on 21st June, 2014 believed to have been characterized with transparency, credibility and fairness to some extent. In doing this, the study adopts both primary and secondary sources of data collection. In which the data sources are complemented with oral interview with stakeholders and the members of public to elicit more information on the election.

The study finds out that there was “over-militarization” of the poll. In other words, there was heavy security presence prior to Election Day. Perhaps, this might have accounted for the successful conduct of the election. The study therefore evaluates the roles played by the security forces in attaining peaceful poll in Ekiti State with a view to maintaining same in future elections in Africa.

Keywords: *Democracy, Election, Popular Participation and Governance.*

INTRODUCTION

Transparent and credible elections are necessary requirements of democratic governance. Although, election does not guarantee democratic rule, it is a fact that democratic rule cannot be sustainable without electoral choices (Etannibi, 2007).

A free and fair election is characterized with:

- (a) people make electoral choices without any inducement and coercion.

- (b) processes and outcomes of election are not manipulated by either the government, groups and individuals.
- (c) the result of such election is widely accepted and not subject to unnecessary litigation in the court of law or election tribunals.
- (d) the votes of all the electorates stand counted;
- (e) the principle of one man, one vote is really upheld

Previous elections held in Nigeria have been characterised either by one or combination of the following factors: (i) electoral fraud; (ii) corrupt inducements (iii) intimidation and violence; (iv) snatching of ballot boxes and other electoral materials (v) assaulting and killing of electoral personnel among others (Awosanya, 2012).

The study therefore examines the roles of the security apparatus in ensuring free, fair, transparent and credible elections in Nigeria with special attention to the recently conducted 2014 governorship election in Ekiti State.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

ELECTION AND DEMOCRACY:- As far as this study is concerned, the following concepts will be clarified: Democracy, Mass Participation, Election, Governance and Development.

The importance of election derives from its role in democratic governance (Akinbosade, 2007). The main aspects of democracy are – choice and consent, popular participation, service delivery, fairness, accountability, rule of law, fundamental human rights and freedom. Indeed, periodic election has become the most important aspect of democracy. It points to the fact that sovereignty belongs to the people rather than the individuals that constitute government.

In any democratic society, such as Ekiti State, elections are governed by rules that are enforced by security and law enforcement agencies (Akpeninor, 2007). The Nigeria Police Force, Armed Forces, intelligence agencies and even Para-policing organisations like The Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps.

Besides, according to the Legislative Digest of 2007 vol. 1, No. 5, p. 13. the major requirements for elections in a democratic society are indicated as follows:

- Universal adult suffrage – right of all adults to vote and run for an office;
- Independent electoral institutions and tribunals;
- Adequate funding of electoral commissions and its adhoc staff;
- Impartial application of electoral rules by unbiased electoral law enforcement agencies;
- Free and fair administration of polls – devoid of both monetary and other forms of corruption; intimidation and frauds;
- Accessibility of polling centres to eligible registered voters;

- Accurate counting of votes and prompt declaration of results, immediately after the voting exercise.

EKITI GUBERNATORIAL ELECTIONS: THE ROLE OF THE SECURITY FORCES

Other concepts that require clarification are popular participation and governance. All these are still the products of proper conduct of the election in any democratic setting.

The West African Examination Council (WAEC, 2014) conceives popular participation from the perspective of active involvement of citizens in the socio-political activities of a country. Popular participation defines this “a process of involving the citizens in the governance of their country and in deciding important socio-cultural, political and economic “matter”. It is further conceived as the procedure of involving majority of the citizens of a country in the decision making processes, especially on issues that affect the welfare of the generality of the populace.

Agagu (2011), sees governance as the “process of using public institution to manage public affairs to ensure effective use of resources to achieve the good life expected of citizen in a both WAEC and Agagu on popular participation and governance, it is reasonable to submit that both concepts ensure political awareness and development, foster socio-economic stability, promote self-fulfilment satisfaction. The concepts both influence the direction of government politicise and finally, ensure equity in the allocation of societal resources (WAEC, 2014:11).

It is important to mention that good governance is characterized with fairness, accountability, consensus orientation, transparency, mass participation, equity among others.

In the words of (Adigun, 2003), he explains that the roles of security agencies in the conduct of credible election among others include: (a) prevention and control of violence (b) protection of all – including the electoral materials, the electoral officials and the electorates (c) prevention of theft, illegal alteration of election results (d) ensuring that the results of the election are publicly posted at each polling unit for all to see.

All these roles are necessary benchmarks for the attainment of free and fair elections. It is interesting that two weeks prior to the Election Day in Ekiti State, the security forces were deployed to the state to map-out areas prone to crisis and violence. On the 17th June, 2014, the Inspector General of Police in conjunction with the Chairman, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Prof. Attahiru Jega held stakeholders’ meeting with all the political parties involved in the race to

conduct themselves well before, during and after the election. Indeed, the central objective of the meeting was to ensure free and fair election.

On the Election Day that is, June 21, 2014, the security forces were decentralised to monitor the conduct of the election. This was done in addition to the directive given by the Inspector General of Police that vehicular movements were suspended from 6 a.m. to 8.30 p.m. on the Election Day, pedestrians were allowed to move freely to polling units of their choice to cast their votes. Indeed, the election was conducted amidst tight security. There was no molestation of voters either by political thugs or party loyalists. People freely cast their votes. It should be stated that the principle of universal adult suffrage – that is right of all adults to vote was really exercised, the elderly ones cast their votes without engaging in “void votes”.

One essential feature of democracy noticeable was “mass participation of votes”. In the history of Nigeria election, there had hardly been a situation where the electorates were educated to cast their votes peacefully as that of Ekiti State on June 21, 2014. In fact, if I may be permitted, that the day indeed could be regarded as “Democracy Day” in anal of Ekiti politics and election. On the part of Electoral Commission, electoral materials arrived to time under heavy security. This of course deterred ballot snatchers from operating. It was really a red letter day for them. At every ward, and unit of poll, accreditation started 8 a.m. and election itself began at the same time by 12 p.m. in all the sixteen (16) local governments of the state. On the part of the electorates, they conducted themselves very well. This conduct, of course, could be attributed to proper and adequate policing by the security agents.

However, it is a common place that there is no perfect system anywhere in the universe. This might have accounted for some speculations that the credibility of the poll could not be ascertained by some critics particularly the All Progressive Congress (APC) that has challenged the heavy presence of the security apparatus in the court of law. Sahara Reporters 21st July, 2014, www.saharareporter.com/2014.../21/gov.key...

Governor Kayode Fayemi’s arguments are based on why he has lost virtually all the local governments despite his power of incumbency. Also, he has confidence that his performance as a governor must have spoken volume for him. In spite of these, it was clear that the election was peacefully and fair conducted.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

All the information supplied herein was gathered through both primary and secondary sources. Those who were there when the events took place and myself were partakers of the event. While some quotes were drawn from texts and journals.

The following were observed as findings:

- (1) It was observed that majority of the registered voters in Ekiti State were mostly students; especially in Ekiti South West, Ilawe Ekiti where I exercised my voting right. And low turn outs were noticed. For instance, at Ward 3, Unit 6, one hundred and seventy one (171) voters registered. Only sixty-three (63) showed up for accreditation. And only fifty-nine (59) actually cast their votes. The remaining four (4) again to exercise their voting right after accreditation, perhaps they were not properly educated by their political parties. Moreover, there was enough room for effective supervision and monitoring by the men of the Nigeria Army and the Police force; possibly due to one type of election that took place – Gubernatorial/governorships election only. In fact at every stage of the exercise, security officers had been every effective.
- (2) The electorates in all the local governments as observed demonstrated high sense of mutual understanding and co-operation.
- (3) The principle of ‘one man, one vote’ actually took place in Ekiti State Gubernatorial election. In fact this was collaborated by Dr. Kayode Fayemi the All Progressive Congress (APC) governorship aspirant who admitted that the election was very free and fair. Source sahara reporter 21st July 2014.
- (4) The results of the election in each polling unit were pasted for everybody to see for the first time in history of Nigeria election.
- (5) It was observed that immediately after the pasting of the results, the people (electorates) were seen congratulating one another. The All Progressive Congress (APC), Labour Party (LP) and People Democratic Party (PDP) were shaking themselves and were exchanging greetings.
- (6) It was also observed that people were very free to move round. Only the vehicular movements were restricted on day of the election from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. on June 21, 2014 as directed by Inspector General of Police as I have indicated elsewhere in this study.
- (7) Finally, the election was very free, fair, credible and transparent. Indeed, it was conducted and conformed to the “best practice” of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). In fact, in the history of Nigeria election, there has not been an election conducted under strict supervision of security apparatus like this gubernatorial election of 21st June, 2014 concluded in Ekiti State.

It is a known fact that the election was exceptionally unique, in the sense that it devoided of ethnic colouration, racism, sentiments, electoral fraud and violence. The result of the poll was such that

might not be challenged in any election tribunals given the free, fair, transparent and credible conduct of the poll.

CONCLUSION

It is therefore recommended that the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) should continue in this manner in order to bring back the departed glory of the commission. Also, the roles of the security personnel in the election had been unparalleled. Given the strict security, it is recommended that free and fair can be attained in future elections in Nigeria and other part of the world, if they are properly tailored in this manner.

Ekiti 2014 gubernatorial election provides a test case to achieving greater electoral performance globally if religiously executed as taken place and discussed in this study.

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