

Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC): An Instrument of Electoral Confusion and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria

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Abstract: The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was established by the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to among other things organize elections into various political offices in the country. The functions of INEC are as contained in section 15, part 1 of the Third Schedule of the 1999 Constitution (As Amended) and section 2 of the Electoral Act 2010 (As Amended). The duties of INEC have been interpreted in several judicial decisions as requiring the Commission to act as an unbiased and non-partisan umpire in the discharge of its duties. However, what is hardly disputed is the fact that the Commission is still saddled with a huge responsibility of ensuring transparency in the electoral process starting from registration of political parties, nomination of candidates to the actual holding of elections. The Commission is charged with the responsibility of registering political parties and had as at 31st December, 2019 registered 91 (ninety one) political parties in a semi-literate society. The 2019 general elections' ballot papers had 91 political parties and their logos listed, and Nigerians were expected to cast their votes for the parties of their choice out of the political parties listed therein. Nigeria, with semi-literate population was confused about the content of the ballot papers, and therefore, majority of them were unable to cast their votes rightly for the parties of their choice. However, in spite of the functions and responsibilities of the Commission as an instrument of democracy, the reverse is the case looking at the aggressive proliferation of political parties that now constitutes electoral confusion, and by logical extension, threatening the democratic consolidation in the country. This paper is of the view that multi-party system is not suitable for Nigeria, and therefore, recommends a two-party system that will cut across the north, west, east, south, religious divide, ethnic divide, class divide, and of course, that will promote the democratic consolidation, as the most suitable party system for Nigeria my beloved country.

Key Words: Proliferation of Political Parties, Electoral Confusion, Democratic Consolidation, Party System

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept "Democracy" means different thing to different people; a school of thought agrees that it is a struggle to gain control; while another is of the view that "Democracy" is about representation. Nwoye (2001) opined that democracy is based on effective representation and participation.

A democratic system is one where rulers are held accountable to the ruled by means of variety of political arrangements.

Such arrangements include, but are necessarily conterminous with competitive multi-party elections held at regular intervals. Oronsaye as cited in Oigiangbe (2018). It is in this view that, Gana, (1996) described democracy as government by persons freely chosen by the governed who also hold them accountable and responsible for their actions while in government.

Today, all over the world, democracy has been seen as the most preferred form of government. One of its cardinal principles is the participation of the people by making a choice on who governed them. Elaigwu, (2014). The National Democratic Institution, (2011) maintains that democracy requires an informed and active public that understands how to voice its interests, act collectively, and hold government officials accountable through credible electoral process. This can also be achieved through democratic participation, debate, and most importantly through voting at elections. Igbokwe-Ibeto, Osakede, and Kinge (2016). Elections involve a set of processes that will lead to the selection of one or more person(s) to serve in positions of authority in the state. It can be argued that credible elections are, therefore, sine qua non for democratic governance, political stability and national development. Igbokwe-Ibeto, Osakede, and Kinge (2016).

In view of the foregoing, we can state that the main features of democracy is that, those persons holding political office do not have an automatic tenure, but can be challenged and even replaced in accordance with the will of the electorate (people) through institutional mechanisms.

The overt dissatisfaction and litigations brought before the Election Tribunals, Courts, and the people's perceptions or opinions against the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) suggests the need to interrogate the significance of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) as an instrument of electoral confusion and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. This is necessary against the backdrop of democratic institution saddled with the responsibility to uphold a democratic process as an instrument of democratic consolidation in Nigeria has collapsed or collapsing through disputes over elections, incessant postponement of elections, infighting among the officials and insecurity.

II. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC): The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was established by the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to among other things organize elections into various political offices in the country. The functions of INEC are as contained in section 15, part 1 of the Third Schedule of the 1999 Constitution (As Amended) and section 2 of the Electoral Act 2010 (As Amended). The duties of INEC have been interpreted in several judicial decisions as requiring the Commission to act as an unbiased and non-partisan umpire in the discharge of its duties.

Elections in Nigeria: Elections are the opportunity for the people to express their sovereignty through the ballot to confer legitimacy on their government, renew its mandate if necessary or withdraw from it the authority to govern which is the basis of accountability in government. Igbokwe-Ibeto, Osakede, Kinge, (2016) citing (INEC, 2011). Abgaje and Adejumbi (2006) noted that elections are an expression of the people's sovereign will, helping to confer legitimacy on political leadership. Elections are said to be a central feature of democracy and for them to express the will of the electorate, they must be free and fair. Democracy proponents believe that if an election is "free", it means that all those entitled to vote are rightly registered and are totally free to make their choice of candidate without imposition or inducement. Perhaps this cannot be said of elections in the Nigeria state, where the inducement of voters by parties and politicians has somewhat become the order of the day.

In the past, there were more cases of snatching of balloting boxes and other forms of violence by politicians wanting to win elections by all means, but recently, the country has seen a wave of vote-buying during elections. Frederick Schaffer as cited by Jesusegun, (2018) stated that vote-buying is giving reward to a person for voting in a particular way. He noted that vote-buying, in its literal sense, is a simple economic exchange, wherein voters sell their votes to candidates, sometimes to the highest bidder, in an election.

Electoral Confusion: The 2019 general elections' ballot papers had 91 political parties and their logos listed, and Nigerians were expected to cast their votes for the parties of their choice out of the political parties listed therein. Nigeria, with semi-literate population was confused about the content of the ballot papers, and therefore, majority of them were unable to cast their votes rightly for the parties of their choice.

Democracy: The term democracy has been of global concern and it is a current socio-economic and political situations or events of countries that are trying very hard for international recognition, development and good governance. The idea as propounded by the ancient Greeks means "demos cratos" which is translated into "people's power or rule" Sarabjit, (2002). It means that democracy has its root in Greek where opportunity was given to a set of individuals to take part in making decisions. It is a universal principle of governance

that upholds high moral standard given to the citizenry the right to participate in the process of decision-making that make them stick firmly to their collective interest. As opined by Muhammad (2013), the concept can therefore be regarded as a governmental system that involves the widest spectrum of participation, either through elections or through the administration of accepted policies. He went further to say that "it is a government founded on the principle of rule of law which is against arbitrariness, high handedness, dictatorship and also antithesis to military regime. This now brings us to democratic consolidation.

Democratic Consolidation: Democratic consolidation is the quality, depth and authenticity of democracy in its various dimensions that has been improved upon. Diamond, (2013), that is, by the participation and representation of the people, broader, transparent and accountability, more systematic, inclusive of all stakeholders and autonomous electoral process, more transparency, harmonization of the various institutions of government.

To Linz (1999) as cited by Igbokwe-Ibeto, Osakede, Kinge, (2016), a consolidated democracy is one in which "none of the major political actors, parties, or organized interest, forces or institutions consider(s) that there is any alternative to the democratic process to gain power and that no political institutions or groups has a claim to veto the action of democratically elected decision makers.

To put it simply, democracy must be seen as "the only activity, business, or plan in the society". It is on this note that, (Im, 1996) stated thus:

"Democratic consolidation includes not only procedural or formal democracy but also substantive democratic elements, such as guarantees of basic civil rights, democratic accountability and responsiveness, civilian control over the military, democratic and constitutional checks on executive authority, and punishment of occupational and human rights abuses". (Im, 1996).

Diamond as cited by Muhammed (2013) sees democratic consolidation as the process of achieving broad and deep legitimation such that all significant political actors believe that popular rule is better for their society than any other realistic alternative they can imagine. Some scholars view it as system maintenance. This, therefore, shows that though Nigeria is practicing democracy since 1999, it should strike more for democratic consolidation.

In the Nigerian political terrain, there have been lots of challenges. Some of the challenges include, but not limited to the quest for democratic consolidation, as incessant postponement of elections does not guarantee confidence, elections' inconclusiveness, insecurity, corruption, the issue of godfatherism, disjointed information, poverty, absence of true federalism, abuse of human right, ethno-religious factor and regionalization are indices of lack of democratic practices.

III. INEC AND PROLIFERATION OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN NIGERIA

In Nigeria, as at 31st December, 2019 there were 91 registered political parties listed out by the Independent National Electoral Commission and these are:

1. Abundant Nigeria Renewal Party (ANRP)
2. Accord (A)
3. Action Alliance (AA)
4. Action Democratic Party (ADP)
5. Action People's Party (APP)
6. Advanced Allied Party (AAP)
7. Advanced Congress of Democrats (ACD)
8. Advanced Nigeria Democratic Party (ANDP)
9. Advanced People Democratic Alliance (APDA)
10. African Action Congress (AAC)
11. African Democratic Congress (ADC)
12. African People's Alliance (APA)
13. All Blending Party (ABP)
14. All Grand Alliance Party (AGAP)
15. All Grassroots Alliance (AGA)
16. All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA)
17. All Progressives Congress (APC)
18. Alliance for a United Nigeria (AUN)
19. Alliance for Democracy (AD)
20. Alliance for New Nigeria (ANN)
21. Alliance National Party (ANP)
22. Alliance of Social Democrats (ASD)
23. Allied Congress Party of Nigeria (ACPN)
24. Allied People's Movement (APM)
25. Alternative Party of Nigeria (APN)
26. Better Nigeria Progressive Party (BNPP)
27. Change Nigeria Party (CNP)
28. Change Advocacy Party (CAP)
29. Coalition for Change (C4C)
30. Congress of Patriots (COP)
31. Democratic Alternative (DA)
32. Democratic People's Congress (DPC)
33. Democratic People's Party (DPP)
34. Freedom and Justice Party (FJP)
35. Fresh Democratic Party (FDP)
36. Grassroots Development Party of Nigeria (GDPN)
37. Green Party of Nigeria (GPN)
38. Hope Democratic Party (HDP)
39. Independent Democrats (ID)
40. Justice Must Prevail Party (JMPP)
41. Kowa Party (KP)
42. Labour Party (LP)
43. Legacy Party Of Nigeria LPN
44. Liberation Movement LM
45. Mass Action Joint Alliance MAJA
46. Masses Movement of Nigerian MMN
47. Mega Progressive People's Party (MPPP)
48. Modern Democratic Party MDP
49. Movement for Restoration and Defense of Democracy MRDD
50. National Action Council NAC
51. National Conscience Party (NCP)
52. National Democratic Liberty Party (NDLP)
53. National Interest Party (NIP)
54. National Rescue Movement (NRM)
55. National Unity Party (NUP)
56. New Generation Party (NGP)
57. New Nigeria People Party (NNPP)
58. New Progressive Movement (NPM)
59. Nigeria Community Movement Party (NCMP)
60. Nigeria Democratic Congress Party (NDCP)
61. Nigeria Elements Progressive Party (NEPP)
62. Nigeria for Democracy (NFD)
63. Nigeria People Congress (NPC)
64. People Democratic Movement (PDM)
65. People for Democratic Change (PDC)
66. People's Democratic Party (PDP)
67. People's Trust (PT)
68. Peoples Coalition Party (PCP)
69. Peoples Party of Nigeria (PPN)
70. Peoples Progressive Party (PPP)

71. Peoples Redemption Party (PRP)
72. Progressive People's Alliance (PPA)
73. Providence People's Congress (PPC)
74. Re-build Nigeria Party (RBNP)
75. Reform and Advancement Party (RAP)
76. Restoration Party (RP)
77. Save Nigeria Congress (SNC)
78. Social Democratic Party (SDMP)
79. Socialist Party of Nigeria (SPN)
80. Sustainable National Party (SNP)
81. United Democratic Party (UDP)
82. United Patriots (UP)
83. United People's Congress (UPC)
84. United Progressive Party (UPP)
85. Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN)
86. We The People Nigeria (WTPN)
87. YES Electorates Solidarity (YES)

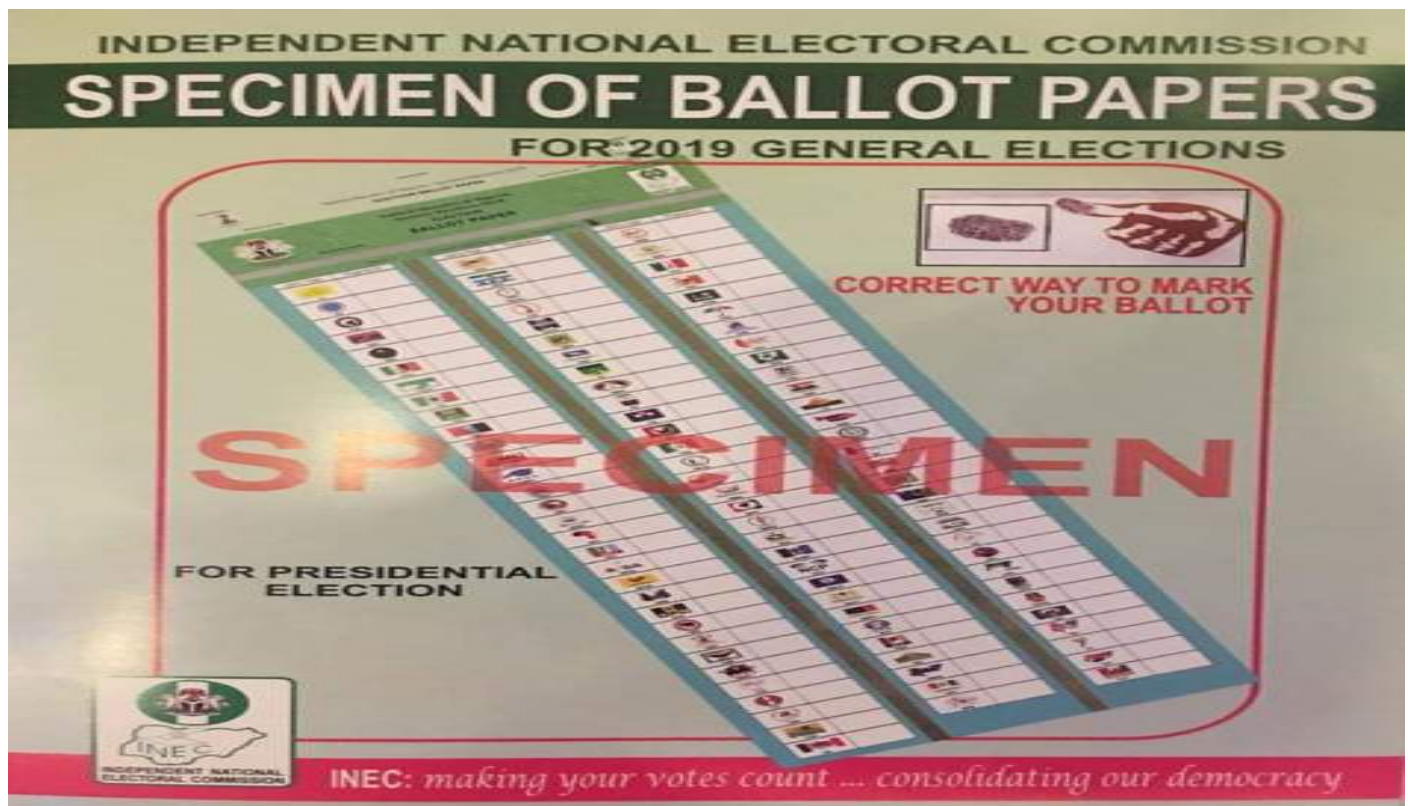
88. Young Democratic Party (YDP)
89. Young Progressive Party (YPP)
90. Youth Party (YP)
91. Zenith Labor Party (ZLP)

Source: <https://nigerianinfopedia.com.ng/full-list-of-registered-political-parties-in-nigeria/>

For elections to be held in Nigeria, the electoral laws demand that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) must design, print and provide ballot papers that the eligible members of the society will use in casting their votes for the party/candidates of their choice. Now, just imagine the cumbersomeness of an electoral paper(s) that will contain the names and symbols of all the political parties as was the case in the 2019 general elections in Nigeria. Again, just consider the number of the Nigerian voters that have been disenfranchised as a result of their levels of education, electoral environment, poverty, lack of political enlightenment and the corrupt practices by the political class, who are desirous of winning all elections by any means.

A specimen of the ballot paper used for the Presidential and other elections in the 2019 general elections is shown hereunder:

Figure 1: Specimen of the Ballot Papers Used For the 2019 General Election



Source: <https://www.oasdom.com/list-of-political-parties-in-nigeria-and-their-logo/>

How can this type of ballot paper guarantee free and fair elections in a semi-literate society like Nigeria? It is very clear that many Nigerians were disenfranchised for various reasons, and these are some of the negative factors for democratic consolidation in the country.

In view of the functional otiosification of the mega-party-practices and the cumbersomeness of the ballot papers to the semi-literate electorates that are in majority in Nigeria, coupled with the fact that many of the political parties could not even win one seat in the various elections in the 2019 general elections, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) decided to deregister 74 (seventy four) of the political parties. However, the decision to deregister the political parties is now a subject of litigation in the Nigerian Court as some of the political parties have taken INEC to court to stop their deregistration.

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is already on the defense and if they are lucky to win, the number of registered political parties in Nigeria will be 18 (eighteen), because in February 2020 they realized the non-functionality of the 91 political parties, and therefore, listed the following 18 political parties as the now registered and their acronym:

- (1) Accord Party - A
- (2) Action Alliance – AA
- (3) African Action Congress – AAC
- (4) African Democratic Congress – ADC
- (5) African Democratic Party – ADP
- (6) All Progressives Congress – APC
- (7) All Progressives Grand Alliance – APGA
- (8) Allied Peoples Movement – APM
- (9) Labour Part – LP
- (10) New Nigeria Peoples Party – NNPP
- (11) National Rescue Movement – NRM
- (12) Peoples Democratic Party – PDP
- (13) Peoples Redemption Party – PRP
- (14) Social Democratic Party – SDP
- (15) Young Progressive Party – YPP
- (16) Zenith Labour Party – ZLP
- (17) Action Peoples Party – APP
- (18) Boot Party – BT.

Source: <https://www.oasdom.com/list-of-political-parties-in-nigeria-and-their-logo/>

Despite the attempt to reduce the number of political parties from 91(ninety one) to 18 (eighteen) if court permits, it is the

submission of this author that the practice cannot guarantee democratic consolidation, because the semi-literate majority of Nigerians will still find it difficult to come to term with the number of political parties as will be reflected on the ballot papers during elections, and this will culminate in the undemocratic consolidation of the practice of democracy in Nigeria.

IV. IMPLICATIONS OF MULTI-PARTY SYSTEM ON PRISMATIC SOCIETIES

The registration of 91 (Ninety one) political parties in Nigeria is expected to widen the political space, give employment to jobless and hungry politicians, expand the space for competitive party politics, and consequently, create room for choices of individual politicians and stern competition among political parties and their gladiators with the sole objective of enthroning good governance and development in Nigeria. Oviasuyi & Aiya, (2003). Unfortunately and regrettably too, the hitherto political associations now mushrooming as political parties, without the financial and political muscles to compete and win a single seat in all elections in a bourgeois political system being practiced in Nigeria have become clogs in the wheel of progress and democratic consolidation with the connivance/compromise of the Independent National Electoral Commission cannot be guaranteed. The political and developmental implications of the proliferation of political parties in a prismatic, plural or heterogeneous society like Nigeria are numerous and catastrophic. These include, but not limited to the following:

- (1) Big threat to the fragile co-existence of Nigerians and Nigeria;
- (2) Painful return to the era of regionalization in Nigeria as the so-called political parties were formed along regional affiliation;
- (3) Further enthronement of ethnic chauvinism by the political parties;
- (4) Entrenchment of corruption among the political parties and their gladiators;
- (5) Institutionalization of classes of class inequalities and class antagonism, etc. etc.

Democracy was accepted and welcomed in Nigeria since it has the capacity to ensure political stability and development. Coleman,(1963). It is unarguably the most preferred form of government worldwide. One of its cardinal principles is the participation of the people by making a choice on who governs them Elaigwu, (2014). Therefore, INEC must create the enabling environment for democracy to strive and be consolidated upon. This, it can achieve through the reduction in the number of political parties to a very manageable figure/number.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Nigeria as a plural society is culturally diverse, and as an evolving nation-state it is seeking to organize these diverse ethnic and cultural groups into a unified polity. There is no

doubt that one of the features or characteristics of politics in every plural society like Nigeria is the need for virtually all the ethnic groups to decide to form their own political party to take adequate care of the needs of its members. Otakpor, (1993). A closer look at the various political parties in Nigeria today reveals that with the exception of All Progressives Congress (APC) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) that seems to have some elements of national outlook, the other political parties are mere expressions of ethnic, regional and class reflections, and aggressive display of sectional chauvinism. The consequence of this is that, Nigeria will not be able to attain an enduring democratic consolidation, and Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should be held liable for the proliferation of political parties that is leading or will continue to lead to undemocratic practices that will prevent democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

The multi-party system of the first and second republics promoted ethnic cleavages, divisive forces and encouraged corruption, nepotism and other negative forces that were inimical to the democratic consolidation, good governance and national development in Nigeria. Osifo, (1998). The present 91 (ninety one) or even the proposed 18 (eighteen) political parties cannot perform otherwise, as all the negative and unfortunate characteristics of the first and second republics are already overtly being manifested or exhibited by our un-progressively minded and self-centred politicians. Therefore, the time is ripe for Nigeria and Nigerians to learn and practice the principles of the aborted third republic where the two-party system was perceived as capable of minimizing, if not completely eliminating the forces of ethnicity, class distinction and regionalization from our polity, thereby guaranteeing the tackling of the pattern of ethnic, religious, north-south or regional voting to ensure political democratic consolidation in the country.

VI. CONCLUSION

It is the submission of this paper that the two-party system is capable of minimizing, if not completely eliminating the forces of ethnicity, class distinction and regionalization from our polity, thereby guaranteeing the tackling of the pattern of ethnic, religious, north-south or regional voting to ensure political democratic consolidation in the country.

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should know that Nigeria has a very large uneducated population that will not be able to identify their political parties in the cumbersome ballot papers for elections, thereby depriving them of their rights to vote. Also, it should urgently stop the proliferation of political parties and embrace the two-party system, so that it does not become an instrument of electoral confusion and democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

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