

# Electoral Process and National Integration in Nigeria: An Analysis of 2019 General Election

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## ABSTRACT

The study examined electoral process and national integration in Nigeria taking cognize of the 2019 general election. The main objectives of the study were; to investigate the link between the outcome of the 2019 general elections and national integration in Nigeria; to examine the influence of ethnic nationalities in the political mobilization and conduct and outcome of the 2019 general elections; and to establish the relationship between voting pattern and regional inclinations. The study adopted the Elite theoretical framework because issues of elections, political parties and governance are decided, dominated and championed by the elites. Furthermore, this paper employed the Ex Post Facto research design, using data gathered from secondary sources. By this, data was surveyed from scholarly journals, texts, periodicals, newspapers, magazines, internet website and other published materials. It was analyzed via content and historical analysis which helped to make deductions leading to findings which amongst others revealed that the electoral process in Nigeria has been characterized by elite manipulation of the process, ballot snatching, and late arrival of electoral material, severe operational and transparency shortcomings, and electoral security problems. The study recommends among others that there should be a formulation of policies and programmes to re-orientate those that are divided along ethnic lines in order to promote good relations among the different ethnic groups in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Voting Pattern, Ethnic Nationality, Political Culture, Electorates.

## INTRODUCTION

The electoral process is a major determinant of democracy that provides the electorate the institutional framework for choosing representatives through a competitive free and fair election. Elections are considered as cardinal and indispensable in the practice of modern democracy. Elections involve a democratic process of choosing who governs a particular group, society or state. As a critical aspect of democracy, elections can take different forms depending on what the polity in question deems appropriate for use (Robert & Obioha 2005). Elections in Nigeria rely on two major legal documents which are the 1999 Constitution as Amended and the Electoral Act 2010. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is the agency that is saddled with the responsibility of the conduct of elections and other related matters such as registration and de-registration of political parties, regulating the conducts and activities of contestants and political parties and designing regulations for the electorates towards the conduct of the election proper.

Elections in Nigeria usually have the political culture and voting pattern of ethnicity, religion and regionalism which is part of the issues that are bedeviling the successful choice of good leaders in the country (Abdullahi, 2015). Closely related to the above is the politics of winning at all cost where elections in Nigeria are marred with rigging, violence, manipulation of results and intimidation of opposition and their supporters using the apparatus of security personnel and political thugs (Auwal, 2015). Nigeria has

witnessed a rising tide of contentious elections ending in heated debates, court challenges, protests and legitimacy crises. In some instances, these election disputes were settled peacefully through legal means and electoral reforms. In others, they triggered bloodshed, destruction, and undermined the capacity for stable governance, and national integration.

The electioneering process in Nigeria is still being blurred by specs of debris from several years of colonial rule followed by the military influence spanning about three decades and the activities aggressive political elite group unwilling to relinquish her hold to what has become a lucrative business for them. The experience in Nigeria showed that the electoral process has engendered ethnic and regional disharmony and disaggregation. This characteristic of the electoral process in Nigeria is rooted in its colonial experience. Political and economic policies of colonial regimes in Nigeria tended towards emphasizing Nigeria's socio-cultural and political pluralism. This has had implications on political instability and national integration in Nigeria.

Moreover, electoral processes in the Nigerian state have been characterized by threats to statehood based on the manipulation of ethnicity as a divisive mechanism for the acquisition of political power by political actors. The violence coupled with the glaring disorganized manual election process has discouraged a sizeable number of citizens from participating in the electoral process. Many citizens faith in the integrity of the electoral process has also waned over the previous years due to the incessant stories of rigging. The number of registered voters is always significantly more than the actual votes cast and these numbers have significantly dwindled in the past years. Experts suggest most electorates are unwilling to participate in the elections primarily because of the conventional practice that requires voters to stand in queues for long hours as witnessed by less than 50% voter turnout in the 2019 general elections in Nigeria.

Nigeria's 2019 general elections were marked by severe operational and transparency shortcomings, electoral security problems, and low turnout. Positively, the elections were competitive, parties were overall able to campaign and civil society enhanced accountability. However, the last-minute postponement of the elections put an undue burden on voters, results' collation procedures were not sufficiently robust, and inadequate information was provided to the public. Fatalities escalated and the role of security agencies became increasingly contentious. The leading parties were at fault in not reining in acts of violence and intimidation by supporters, and in abusing incumbency at federal and state levels. Except for federal radio, state media primarily served the interests of the president or the governor at state level. Journalists were subject to harassment, and scrutiny of the electoral process was at times compromised with some independent observers obstructed in their work, including by security agencies. The suspension of the chief justice of Nigeria by the president a few weeks before the elections was seen to lack due process and reportedly undermined judicial independence. The number of women elected fell again.

These systemic failings show the need for fundamental reform so elections better serve the interests of the Nigerian people. Essentially, the elections created "mobilization gaps", built around religion and ethnicity. These factors shaped the pre- and post-election periods and divisions between ethnic groups associated with the incumbent regime (in-group) and other ethnic groups (out-group). This triggered widespread inter-group mistrust and insecurity which have conduced into post-election appointments along primordial lines like religion, region and ethnicity. As a consequence of the acrimonious and hate-laden elections, post-election appointments are designed to widen the chasm of ethnic, regional, partisan and religious lines in Nigeria. This is because the ruling class places a high premium on the control of state power which is the biggest and most easily accessible source of wealth accumulation. They use all means to attain this objective including fostering ethnic sectarianism and political repression. Being the exclusive tool of those in power (who are agents of ethnic groups), defending their prebends becomes a very fundamental and charged issue; politics and elections become an overriding and war-like exercise waged among ethnic

groups (Ibeanu, 1993).

The foregoing analysis indicates that after 59 years of political independence in which Nigeria has witnessed a series of secession threats, military coups, a thirty month bloody civil war, and 29 years of military rule (1966-1979, 1983-1999), Nigeria is still in search of national integration. As long as Nigeria continues to grapple with this problem of unity and nation-building, integration in Nigeria will continue to be a fertile ground of study by students, scholars, and researchers who would want to explain the why of the problem so as to get insight into how it can best be resolved. This study is predicated on the assumption that in Nigeria, the electoral process is considered a critical element in engendering national integration and political development.

In view of the foregoing, this study explored the following objectives.

1. The extent to which the electoral process has engendered national integration and cohesion in Nigeria
2. The influence of ethnic nationalities in the formation of political parties, conduct and outcome of general elections in Nigeria.
3. Whether the voting patterns in Nigeria's general elections reflect national affinity or regional/ethnic inclinations.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### Electoral Process

Electoral process according to Elekwa (2008), relates to the entire cycle ranging from the provision of voter education to the dissolution of the National Assembly. Furthermore, INEC (2006), in Elekwa (2008), deposes that the different phases of the electoral process include the following:

- Delimitation of electoral boundaries
- Registration of voters
- Notice of elections
- Nomination of candidates
- Election campaigns
- Elections, announcement of results and completion of tribunal sittings
- Participation of other organizations
- Resolution of electoral conflicts resulting from the participation of other organizations, people, groups, etc.

The electoral process is therefore a complex process that encompasses the good intentions and undesirable outcomes of election administration, particularly in emerging democracies where general elections are often marred by culturally hued electoral malpractices.

In the Nigerian case, the truth remains that the electoral process is immensely characterized by a culture of electoral malpractices. Electoral malpractices refer to illegalities committed by government officials responsible for the conduct of elections, political parties, groups or individuals with sinister intention to influence an election in favour of a candidate or candidates (Ezeani 2004). Intense electoral malpractices often lead to electoral violence which in every polity must be considered undesirable.

However, an electoral process is distinct from an electoral system. Reynolds, et al (2005) describes an electoral system as follows: At the most basic level, electoral systems translate the votes cast in a general election into seats won by parties and candidates. The key variables are the electoral formula used (i.e. whether a plurality/majority, proportional, mixed or other system used, and what mathematical formula is

used to calculate the seat allocation), the ballot structure (i.e. whether the voter votes for a candidate or a party and whether the voter makes a single choice or expresses a series of preferences) and the district magnitude (not how many voters live in a district, but how many representatives to the legislature that the district elects).

In the opinion of this work, the electoral process commences with the announcement of intention to conduct elections, till the elections have been won and invariably lost.

### **National Integration**

National integration, otherwise termed nation-building, national unity, national cohesion, national loyalty, or the national question “involves consensus on the limits of the political community and on the nature of the political regime” (Liddle, 1970 cited in Otite, 2000). This simply means the forging of agreement among the members of a state on the extent of unity they wish to have as well as the type of political structure and institutions they desire. It is also a “process of unifying a society which tends to make it a harmonious city, based on an order its members regard as equitably harmonious” (Duverger, 1976). This implies that integration promotes unity which encourages smooth interaction among the members of the given society based on certain established principles of fairness.

Jacob and Tenue (1964) define national integration as “a relationship of community among people within the same political entity... a state of mind or disposition to be cohesive, to act together, and to be committed to mutual programmes”. They are thus referring to a society of oneness whose members are willing to live and work together harmoniously and share the same destiny. It has also been viewed as: a process by which members of a social system develop linkages so that the boundaries of the system persist over time and the boundaries of sub-systems become less consequential in affecting behaviour. In this process, members of the social system develop an escalating sequence of contact, cooperation, consensus and community (Morrison et al, 1972 cited in Ojo, 2005). This relates to a situation where territorial divisions within a polity gradually yield ground to cordial interactions of its members owing to the integrative mechanisms established.

Similarly, Coleman and Rosberg (1964) view national integration as the progressive reduction of cultural and regional tensions and discontinuities in the process of creating a homogeneous political community. In other words, this is the increasing promotion or emergence of peace through the breaking down of cultural and regional divides in the process of evolving a united state. It has been argued that a society is integrated when “(a) it has effective control over the use of the means of violence; (b) it has a center of decision making capable of effecting the allocation of resources and rewards; and (c) it is a dominant focus of political identification for a large majority of politically aware citizens” (Etzioni, 1965 cited in Ojo, 2005).

Also, Ogunjenite (1987) believes that national integration relates to the building of nation-states out of disparate socio-economic, religious, ethnic and geographical elements. According to him, this entails the translation of diffuse and unorganized sentiments of nationalism into the spirit of citizenship through the creation of state institutions that can translate into policy and programmes in line with the aspirations of the citizenry. Stated in another way, national integration means efforts to weld together a plural society to enhance development but without necessarily jeopardizing ethnic identity (Ogunjenite, 1987 cited in Ojo, 2009).

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The study adopted the Elite theoretical framework. The term “elite” is derived from the French root and it means excellent. The elitist theory is a theory of the state, which seeks to describe and explain the power

relationships among various interests in contemporary societies. The core postulation of the theory is that a small group of people consisting mostly of members of the economically dominant class holds the most important power in a society and that this power is independent of a state's democratic electoral process. The basic assumption of the elitist theory is that every society consists of two classes of people, the class that rules (the elite class) and the class that is ruled (the masses or the non-elite class).

The theory was popularized through the writings of the classical sociologists Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca, Robert Michels and Ortega Gasset (Adisa, 2010). Pareto, one of the proponents of the theory also developed the theory of circulation, which describes the movement of elites and individuals from higher to lower levels and vice versa. With respect to his work on the ruling class, Adesina, (2006), maintains that two classes of people exist, a class that rules and a class that is ruled. He argues that the elites constitute an organized minority and it was the class that rules while the masses constitute an unorganized majority and it the class that is ruled. It was based on this that he concluded that all system of government since the existence of human history was only an abstraction of oligarchy.

As observed by Agu, Okeke, and Idike (2013) the argument of Robert Michels in his work – “Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy” (1911), that the iron law of Oligarchy keeps the majority of human beings in a condition of eternal tutelage, thereby submitting themselves to external domination. Using the concept of mass mind, he argues that majority of human beings are politically apathetic, indolent, slavish and subservient and are permanently incapable of self-governing. He believes that people who were apathetic are susceptible to flattery and are weak in the presence of great strength.

Hence, the ruling elites take advantage of this to perpetuate themselves in power (Akintunde, 2009). In Ortega Gasset's perspective, the masses decide who rules and how they are to be ruled. He posits that a nation's greatness depends on the capacity of the people to choose the right type of people to pilot its affairs.

Applying the elitist theory of politics to the Nigerian democratic situation reveals a situation whereby the major political parties in the country are controlled by very few individuals who have besieged the available posts and positions in the upper hierarchy of the parties.

Hence, this study was adopted because issues of elections, political parties and governance are decided, dominated and championed by the elites. They end up taking up all position of interest, impose their decision, and will on the people who in most cases have no choice. In addition, some individuals in governments have wielded so much power that they can monopolize political power and do everything possible to retain it (Andy, 2007). They have the money to buy over any electoral or judicial officer to romance the electoral system and of course, ‘every man has his price’. They employ every means available including rigging of elections and sponsoring violence to retain political power, which is the surest access to economic power in Nigeria. At the end, the helpless and disillusioned electorates are left to watch the drama. The spirit of sportsmanship is next to zero and no loser seems to be in concordance with the electoral process. From the very foundation, politicians have learnt to exploit the religious and ethnic diversities of the country to their advantage, crying foul when the process does not skew to their selfish motives and setting different ethnic and religious nationals at loggerheads.

## METHODOLOGY

Research is defined as a systematic or scientific investigation of experimentation aimed at the discovering of facts (Enoh 1997). Research design could be the systematic process of collecting, analyzing and interpreting data with a view of finding solution to the problem under investigation. This research work employed the Ex Post Facto research design, using data gathered from secondary sources. It was analysed via content and

historical analysis. Data for the study were obtained from the secondary sources. By this, scholarly journals, texts, periodicals, newspapers, magazines, internet website and other published materials formed our main sources of data. Data were analysed qualitatively. Contextual and implied analysis helped us to make deductions leading to findings.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A factsheet on the 2019 General Elections revealed that there were 84million registered voters out of which 72.8million voters collected their Permanent Voter Cards; 91 registered political parties; 119,973 Polling Units; 120 Accredited Domestic Observers and 36 Accredited Foreign Observers and 23,000 candidates competing for 1,558 positions. They were 73 candidates for the Presidency, 1,899 for 109 Senate seats and 4,680 for the 360 House of Representatives seats. For the state elections, there were 1,046 candidates for the 29 governorships, and 14,609 candidates for the 991 state assembly seats. Seven (7) elections were also conducted over two (2) Saturdays. On February 23, 2019, elections were conducted for the office of the President, Vice President, Senate and the House of Representative. On the other hand, governorship, state house of assembly, chairmanship and councillorship elections of the six Area Councils of the Federal Capital Territory held on March 9, 2019.

In this section, the research questions were analysed qualitatively using generated arguments and deductions leading to findings.

### **What is the extent to which the electoral process has engendered national integration and cohesion in Nigeria?**

General elections were held in Nigeria on 23rd February 2019 to elect the President, Vice President, Senators and members of the House of Representatives. The elections had initially been scheduled for 16th February 2019, but the Electoral Commission postponed the vote by a week at 03:00am on the original polling day, citing logistical challenges in getting electoral materials to polling stations on time. In some places, the vote was delayed until 24th February, 2019 due to electoral violence. Polling in some areas was subsequently delayed until 9th March 2019, when voting was carried out alongside Gubernatorial and State Assembly elections.

The results of the presidential election were announced in the early hours of 27th February 2019. Incumbent APC candidate President Muhammadu Buhari won his reelection bid with 55.6 per cent of valid votes, defeating his closest rival Atiku Abubakar who received 41.2 per cent of valid votes by over 3 million votes. According to Ojo (2019), "He has been issued a Certificate of Return, and was sworn in on 12th June 2019" (Punch Newspaper, Wednesday March 20, 2019).

Being the most competed for; the 2019 general elections also attracted a lot of controversies. From October 7, 2018, when political parties finished conducting their primaries, there have been over 640 court cases from aggrieved aspirants (Punch Newspaper, Wednesday March 20, 2019). Immediately following the elections, there were claims of widespread fraud by the opposition. The claims included accusations of ballot box snatching, vote-trading and impersonation. Nigeria's 2019 general elections were also marked by severe operational and transparency shortcomings, electoral security problems, and low turnout. Attempts to amend the Electoral Act were, however, unsuccessful and legal shortcomings which include includes a lack of transparency requirements and some candidacy criteria that overly exclude citizens from running for office continued, including in regards to specific procedures for the use of smart card readers. The suspension of the chief justice of Nigeria by the president a few weeks before the elections was seen to lack due process and reportedly undermined judicial independence. This had an inhibiting effect on the judiciary. It was seen by many as undermining security of tenure, damaging judicial independence and compromising the division of powers. The suspension did not follow due process, was divisive, and undermined

confidence in the electoral process and opportunity for remedy.

The elections became increasingly marred by violence and intimidation. Fatalities escalated and the role of security agencies became increasingly contentious. The leading parties were at fault in not reining in acts of violence and intimidation by supporters, and in abusing incumbency at federal and state levels. These harmed the integrity of the electoral process and may deter future participation. Party leaderships did not take sufficient steps to rein in their supporters. Based on information available, around 150 people died in election-related violence during the campaign period and over the election days. INEC reported attacks on its offices, and also fatalities, abductions and sexual assault against its officials. During collation of the federal results, EU observers directly witnessed or received reports of intimidation of INEC officials in 20 states. During the 23rd March supplementary elections, EU observers saw groups of men with weapons intimidating and obstructing the process, and security agencies were ineffective at protecting citizens' right to vote.

Another thing that singled out the 2019 general election was the high number of cancelled votes due to violence, over-voting and non-adherence to the use of Smart Card Readers. The cancelled votes which are in millions brought about, five inconclusive governorship elections in Kano, Sokoto, Plateau, Adamawa and Benue State. There were also 7 inconclusive senatorial elections, 24 inconclusive House of Representatives election and 3 inconclusive Area Council chairmanship polls in the FCT. After dealing with arson and postponement, more challenges lurked around for INEC. There were disruptions in Bauchi and Rivers where collation was suspended until 2nd April 2019. Again there was a lack of polling and results data available centrally or locally. Many problems were evident in 150 polling unit results forms examined from the governorship and presidential races. Most contained mathematical anomalies, 13 per cent had missing data, and some had more valid votes recorded than accredited voters.

Federal government-owned TV clearly favored the president and the ruling party, with their joint share of airtime reaching 84 per cent of primetime coverage of election and political matters. Similarly, state-level state-owned radio stations monitored served incumbent governors' interests. Incumbent share of coverage ranged from 72 to 100 per cent, and eight of nine monitored state-owned radios did not even mention the names of governors' main challengers during the news. Such biases by state outlets undermined a level playing field and were not consistent with national and international standards for public broadcasting, as well as professional good practice. Media freedom was curbed by vaguely-defined content restrictions, attacks and harassment of journalists and scrutiny of the electoral process was at times compromised with some independent observers obstructed in their work, including by security agencies. EU EOM media monitoring over 46 days showed federal government-owned radio's commitment to balanced election coverage

Nigeria's more than one million internally displaced voters had only a limited opportunity to vote. Late adoption of INEC regulations and inconsistent practices resulted in low registration and PVC distribution rates. INEC did not sufficiently consult with displaced communities and released almost no public data or information on provisions for internally displaced persons (IDPs). In practice, IDPs were often required to return to their constituency of origin to vote, irrespective of any security concerns or logistical difficulties. Persons with disabilities have insufficient opportunities for participating in the electoral process. Only six reportedly contested out of more than 20,000 candidates and none were elected. INEC undertook consultations with disabled persons' organizations and made positive commitments in its framework, but its plans were not sufficiently implemented.

Besides, the 2019 general elections were the costliest in Nigeria's history. Cash determined the winners and losers. 'Secure the bag' rose in ranks at the expense of contesting to serve the people. Bullion vans moved freely on the streets. No wrong was seen in this yet we answer the title – propagators of modern democracy. Officially, the Federal Government funded the elections with a whopping N242billion, N189billion of

which went to INEC while the remaining N53 billion was shared by the security agencies for the purpose of election security. This is outside the millions of dollars spent on the commission by the various international donor partners. To run in a primary of the two main parties involved prohibitive financial costs of up to N45 million (around €110,000). Procedural problems included an overall lack of transparency, winners being subsequently changed by party leaderships, and parties not having objective criteria for screening candidates.

Apathy came to devour the electoral process. Apathy ejected its host, INEC and ate to its fill. This affected votes recorded at the polls on February 23 and March 9, 2019. It appeared citizens had lost confidence in the process initially scheduled for 16th February and 2nd March, 2019. Their minds were made up (THISDAY, Monday, April 8, 2019). Questionable figures influenced victories against the wishes of the people. Results were declared at gun points. But again, voters had themselves to blame for not showing up at polling units on Election Day. Although they can't feign ignorance of conspiracy at collation centers, apathy fuels and prepares the ground for the enthronement of compromise.

Positively, the elections were competitive with a large number of candidates for all seats and civil society enhanced accountability, although competition was primarily between the All Progressives Congress (APC) and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). Parties and candidates were overall able to campaign, with freedoms of assembly, expression and movement broadly respected. In total, there were 91 registered political parties, with 73 candidates for the presidency. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) worked in a complex security and politically-charged environment and made a number of improvements, including making electoral participation more accessible through simplified voting procedures. INEC also made efforts to strengthen electoral integrity by issuing regulations making smart card readers mandatory to accredit voters and also gave regular updates on election preparations. Furthermore, INEC consulted with women's groups and undertook gender-sensitization efforts on electoral participation. A range of civil society organizations effectively contributed to election reform, scrutiny and voter awareness. Positively, the civil society-led "Not Too Young to Run" campaign resulted in the constitutional change reducing the minimum wages for candidacies. Citizen observers provided vital information updates over the election days, which was particularly important when information was not forthcoming from INEC. Coordinated independent observation of different aspects of the election positively contributed to the accountability of the process.

From the foregoing analysis, although elections reflect the basis of the social contract between the representatives and the represented, the electoral process in Nigeria has been characterized by elite manipulation of the process, ballot snatching, late arrival of electoral material, etc. This has marred the democratization process, thus to a small extent engendered national integration and cohesion in Nigeria.

### **What has been the influence of ethnic nationalities in the formation of political parties, conduct and outcome of general elections in Nigeria?**

Structurally, Nigeria is a heterogeneous society, made up of different ethnic nationalities with diverse belief systems, customs and institutions. Though the exact number of ethnic groups is not known, some scholars put the number at 250, while others believe that it has more than 350 ethnic groups (Obikeze and Anthony, 2003). Professor Okwudiba Nnoli, a leading expert on ethnic politics in Africa attributed this uncertainty to lack of agreement on the criteria used in identifying ethnic groups (Nnoli, 2008).

On the other hand, political parties are democratic institutions that are central to political processes in a democracy. Political parties are also central to democracy because they do not only serve as institutions for the acquisition, manifestation and check on power but they represent a belief system in terms of ideology and interest and also constitute the mechanism through which interests are heard, represented and aggregated for cohesion and national integration.



In Nigeria, the political scene is dominated by three major ethnic groups, namely Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo. Other sub-groups exist but are regarded as minorities. The existence of sub-groups among the large and dominant groups raises the fear of dominance of the minority groups by the major ethnic groups. Consequently, politics is played by these ethnic groups and sub-groups in such a manner as to maintain the domination by the majority groups or to prevent and resist domination by the minority groups. According to Omodia (2013), in the Nigerian state, when it comes to power acquisition, ethnic consideration could be seen to override national interest. This no doubt explains the reason for the zoning of political offices based on ethnic interest rather than competence which is more disadvantageous to national interest. The negative implication of this scenario is the use of ethnic militia for the purpose of drawing attention to power (Omodia and Aliu 2013).

The start of ethnic politics in Nigeria can be traced to the emergence of political parties and party politics made possible by the Clifford Constitution of 1922. Consequently, political parties which emerged were based on ethnicity. Oladiran (2013) observes that during this period, the seed of ethnic politics was sown, germinating in the First Republic and then spreading to subsequent republics. Ethnic political identification in Nigeria's electoral process was blamed on the British colonialism which capitalized on the absence of a common political system and a non-unifying myth of ancestry to perpetrate obnoxious policies of 'divide-and-rule', and application of those policies of traditional institutions (obaship, emirate and republican) and structures of the various ethnic groups to sow distrust, rivalry and lack of cooperation that characterized relations between the dominant ethnic groups in Nigeria (Emezi, 1997). Ake (1991), Bassey and Tom (2005) and Okolie and Ezeibe (2010) reasoned that the overvalued premium placed on politics and position of office because of the resources of the state exacerbate ethnic politics between three unequal regions that were bequeathed Nigeria's political elite by the departing British colonial government and, by extension, institutionalized fraud in electoral process. The colonial masters also conscientiously educated the north that whoever controls the election administration can determine election outcomes in Nigeria. According to Orebe (2013), it is no wonder the electoral body is accused of developing into a Northern enclave.

Efforts of political leadership to make parties free of ethnic foundation eventually ended up with the formulation of ethno-regional associations for the Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa-Fulani such as Anfenifere, Ohaneze and Arewa Consultative Forum with their respective militant youth vanguards to promote, secure and protect their political interests even more than the political parties. The local militia groups that were trained and armed for rigging elections are, by the narrow interests of the politicians forgotten in the scheme of sharing political spoils – appointments, better jobs and they fall prey, with the guns in their hands, to criminal activities of armed robbery, kidnapping, terrorism, etc.

Ethnic parties in Nigeria operate in ideological void, indirection and as mere strategic machineries in the hands of ruling party for infiltration, crisis-generation and destabilization of more formidable opposition parties. The parties operate as agents on the basis of cash-and-carry politics for extracting favours in a manner of complicit clientelism due to the stage of socio-economic development and structural condition of Nigeria (Huntington, 1968). Susan Stoes in Boix and Stokes (eds) (2007) explained that clientelism is a political order where the criterion of distribution that the party uses is simply: did you (will you) support me?

Wantchekon (2003) maintains that incumbent parties with greater access to state patronage can also better establish clientelist linkages because their promises of particularistic benefits are more than those of the opposition.

In Nigeria, the manipulation of ethno regional identity reached new heights in the march towards the 2019 elections, making the elections to appear like a form of warfare between the north and south. In the buildup to the elections, there were campaigns by local PDP (Peoples Democratic Party) activists urging voters in the South East not to support the APC (All Progressive Congress), describing the party as a reincarnation of the Northern-Yoruba alliance that defeated Biafra in the civil war of 1967-1970.

Therefore, the result of the 2019 general elections revealed the influence of ethnicity on the outcome of the election which was a manifestation of the ethno-political dimension which characterized the elections of the First and Second Republics.

### **Do voting patterns in Nigeria's general elections reflect national affinity or regional/ethnic inclinations?**

Voting patterns in Nigeria's elections have always generated tensions, anxieties, and controversies, particularly among the electorate. This is connected to the fact that electioneering periods are characterized by hate speeches which in most cases have an ethnic undertone. Elections under these circumstances become mere expression of ethnic bias or prejudice. This position contends that voters employ the act of voting to express and hence register their identities as part of an ethnic group. However, the Nigeria's experience is ethnic bloc voting.

Ethnic bloc voting in highly fragmented societies poses a great challenge to efforts at nation-building. Votes cast along ethnic lines for a particular candidate who belongs to the same ethnic group as the voter constitutes a voting pattern that translate to a psychological affirmation of group identity (Horowitz 1985). This feeling of ethnic identity thwarts efforts geared achieving a strong and united nation amidst fragmented and highly distinct ethno-cultural linguistic group. While voting based on ethnic affiliation undermines the legitimacy of the resultant regime, a candidate who emerges as winner with votes widespread across a heterogeneous society tends to have the support of the citizens irrespective of their ethnic and regional affiliation.

Elections in Nigeria usually have the voting pattern of ethnicity, religion and regionalism which is part of the issues that are bedeviling the successful choice of good leaders in the country (Abdullahi, 2015).

Without doubt, Nigeria is an amalgam of rival ethnic groups pitch against each other in the contest of power and resources that have reflected in the political processes, sometimes threatening to the corporate existence of the country (Metumara, 2010). As rightly pointed out, ethnicity or loyalty to one's ethnic group is a bane of Nigerian politics (Salami, 2004).

## **CONCLUSION**

The main essence of this study was to examine the extent to which the electoral process has engendered national integration in Nigeria, the influence of ethnic nationalities in the formation of political parties, conduct and outcome of general elections and whether the voting patterns in Nigeria's general elections reflect national affinity or regional/ethnic inclinations. Hence, the implications of the findings of this study in assessing the role of the 2019 general election in Nigeria's national integration reveals that the electoral process hinders national integration. This is a reflection of the fact that the electoral process in Nigeria has been characterized by elite manipulation of the process, ballot snatching, and late arrival of electoral material, severe operational and transparency shortcomings, and electoral security problems. Also, ethnicity is a dominant social and political phenomenon within the Nigerian polity in terms of the formation of parties, conduct and outcome of elections. This is reflected in the words of Omodia (2013), that "in the Nigerian state, when it comes to power acquisition, ethnic consideration could be seen to override national interest". Finally, the study revealed a significant relationship between the relics of colonialism and electoral process in Nigeria. This is evident in the fact that start of regional electoral process in Nigeria can be traced to the emergence of political parties and party politics made possible by the Clifford Constitution of 1922.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study as presented and analysed, the following recommendations are deemed necessary by the researcher;

1. There should be a formulation of policies and programmes to re-orientate those that are divided along ethnic lines in order to promote good relations among the different ethnic groups in Nigeria.
2. INEC procedures for the collation of results be elaborated and strengthened to improve integrity and confidence in electoral outcomes. Detailed INEC procedures be developed that provide for public scrutiny in dealing with irregularities and anomalies on results forms at all levels.
3. The costly and materialistic nature of the elections should be reduced because the financial stakes in today's elections have gone to the level that only those who have tasted power previously or work with the government for so many years and accumulate more money are capable backing their political claims.
4. Reforms should be made in the licensing system for broadcast media to provide for pluralism and diversity in all states. Ownership structures are publicized, powers to grant licenses is vested in the National Broadcasting Commission without presidential approval, and license fees be tailored to the economic circumstances in each state.

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