



## Achieving good governance through credible elections in Nigeria

Yakubu Hauwa<sup>1</sup>, John Attah Ogijo<sup>2</sup>, Abubakar Usman Babohi<sup>3</sup>, Alhassan Yakubu Adeku<sup>4</sup>,  
Ekpa Ele Grace<sup>5</sup> and Raji Abdulwasiiu Adeyemi<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>*School of General and Communication Studies, Kogi State Polytechnic Lokoja, Nigeria.*

<sup>3,4,5,6</sup>*School of Management Studies, Kogi State Polytechnic Lokoja, Nigeria.*

Corresponding Email: [abdulwasiiuraji5@gmail.com](mailto:abdulwasiiuraji5@gmail.com)

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### Abstract

*Credible elections are prerequisite for the foundation and preservation of democratic ethos in any civilized society. This is because, election serves as legitimate and orderly means of transferring political power from one government to the other. However, in most developing countries in the world Nigeria inclusive, to achieve undisputable legitimacy vis-à-vis smooth transferring of political power has become a mirage as most of the elections conducted in Nigeria were characterized by massive rigging, irregularities and manipulations, occasioned by political actors in order to wrestle power at all cost, denies the electorates the opportunity to choose the candidates of their choice. Given the above background, this paper examines the intercourse between good governance and credible elections in Nigeria. The paper adopts theory of structural functionalism to explain the scenario. While the study employs secondary sources of data collection in explaining the topic of discourse. The study discovered that good governance cannot be achieved in the absence of credible elections. The paper therefore recommends that for elections to be free, fair and credible in Nigeria political actors and stakeholders must live up to expectation by adhering to the rule of the game while the electoral umpire must be genuinely independent.*

**Keywords:** Credible Elections, Elections Rigging, Democracy, Good Governance, Nigeria

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### 1. Introduction

Globally, election is viewed as the soul of modern government. Genuine election does not only represent acceptability of government, it is also fundamental to the preservation of democratic ethos. Elections provide the citizens opportunity to choose their desire candidate freely. In an ideal democratic environment, people who have attained the voting age are given the privilege to have political alternatives that lead to decisions that represent their choices. Under liberal democratic system, this preference is considered among the various political parties as well as the candidates jostling for positions during elections. In any democratic setting, according to Animashaun (2010), election plays different roles. It is a medium through

which the electorates demand for stewardship and accountability from their elected representatives; it enables voters to make good choices; it aids political recruitment; and it gives moral right on political leaders.

Schlozman and Verba (1987) observed that election is regarded as a “legitimizing institution, working to give elected representatives the ability to govern”. Elections represent an institutionalized process or procedure through which the electorates or citizens choose their representatives that will represent them at various levels of government. While Lipset, Linz and Diamond (1989) sees representative government as an ideal that satisfies three rudimentary requirements



such as inclusive system of leadership recruitment; competition among political parties involved; and the presence of an era of constitutional and civil rights. These requirements underline the imperative of voting as an act of legitimacy and as requirement for participating in politics.

An effective democratic cum voting system revolves around the capacity to establish credible, free and fair elections, effective and independent electoral management, sophisticated security and independent and incorruptible judiciary. Voting symbolizes the heart of representative government and the regularity, openness and objectivity of the election are vital to the stability of the system. The level at which voting promotes representative government depends largely on the part of prevailing voting system, its nature and its recognition by the political actors cum politicians in the political process. Nnoli (2003) defined voting system as a “complex of guidelines and regulations that guide the selection of public office holders” in a political setting. The option of a certain balloting system does not only have significant consequence on the electoral system of a nation, it also has positive and negative effects to stakeholders like politicians, political parties as well as political operators.

Having a free, fair, reliable and all-inclusive voting system is an essential ingredient in all representative government. The presence of a strong voting system is germane to the existence of any representative government. However, credible and all-inclusive electoral system has always remained elusive in Nigeria as most elections conducted in the past were characterized by unjust disqualification of candidates, voters’ intimidation, snatching of data capturing machines, massive rigging, irregularities and manipulations making it difficult for men and women with requisite credentials of integrity and credibility that have to of This is the case in Nigeria where opportunity to power and

state resources is regarded as avenue of ensuring one’s economic advantage.

### **Problem Statement**

To have a government that is adjudged good governance in all ramifications cannot just occur by chance; rather it is as a result of actions of various groups, individuals and institutions within cum outside a political system. There are certain actions and inactions that are responsible for good governance in a country which includes credible and transparent electoral processes, unbiased and independent electoral umpire, vibrant national security and incorruptible and independent of judiciary. However, political processes in Nigeria have always been tempestuous and fraudulent events since the independence to the current republic. The political shenanigan has continued to hinder development and good governance the country desired.

Corroborating the above point of view, Badejo and Obah-Akpowoghaha (2015) maintained that all the previous elections in Nigeria, from 1960 to 2011 were all characterised by fraud and irregularities, except that of 1993 and 2015 elections that were regarded as the freest elections ever organized since Nigeria independence. They posited further that the experiences of voters’ intimidation, snatching of ballot boxes, physical assault and rigging were at its lowest form during the 1993 and 2015 elections. However, the major challenge with the voting arrangement in the country has been absence of impartiality from the political umpire vis-à-vis government involvement in the political process that hamper a level playing ground among the stakeholders, political actors and political parties, leading to bad governance. Therefore, in the light of the above scenario, this paper attempts to examine the intercourse between genuine elections and good governance in Nigeria.



## **2. Literature Review**

### **Conceptual Explanation**

#### **Election**

Egwemi (2014), defined election as a process through which citizens exercise their fundamental human rights especially the right to select those who will represent them at various levels of government. Oni (2016) viewed the concept as a common and transparent way of acquiring political power in a civilized political system by which citizens cast their votes for their candidates in a competitive process. Philip (2020) viewed election as an act of group decision that ensues in a stream of connected antecedent and consequent behaviour, including the involvement of the citizens in the act of selecting their representatives and involvement in governance. Election connotes an institutionalized process through which the electorates or citizens choose their representatives that will represent them at various levels of government. Elections provide the citizens opportunity to choose among the numerous candidates in a competitive process.

#### **Credible Election**

Magaji and Ahmed (2018) declared that credible elections exists when the rules, guidelines and regulations concerning the electoral procedure are taking into consideration and genuine citizens are fairly and freely chosen to represent the people entitled to vote. They maintained further that credible election hangs on four variables which include individuals, political parties, voting process and the outcome of the election. That is, citizens must be free to partake in the electoral process, to associate with the political party of his choice, to solicit for votes and to strive for position in the political party he or she desired. Again, for an election to be adjudged to be free, fair and credible, political parties must be allowed to compete, to come together, to mobilize members, to carryout rallies, to articulate policies and to canvass for votes. On the

angle of voting process, that is, there must be principle of one man one vote and one woman one vote. That is, no accredited voter must be disallowed to vote, and there must not be multiple voting. While on the election results or outcome, for election to be adjudged to be free, fair and credible if the election results are accurately announced and the legitimate winners are allowed to assume office.

From the above assertions, credible elections must satisfy the principles of all-inclusiveness, accountability, transparency, and competitiveness. All-inclusiveness elections provide the same opportunities for all eligible voters to partake as electorates in choosing their candidates and as representatives for election to government. Accountability in an election is a key mechanism through which voters hold their representatives accountable. Accountability also occurs within electoral processes itself. In the same token, elections are transparent when each stage of election is subject to scrutiny, and every stakeholder can independently confirm or authenticate whether the procedure is conducted on the principle of honestly and accuracy. Competitive in an election it is when voters have equal and reasonable chances to compete and to be voted for into governmental offices. Political competition is a key factor of elections that genuinely reflect the yearnings and aspirations of the citizens.

#### **Good Governance**

According to Kukah (1998) good governance simply means governance that is accountable, responsible, and transparent in policy making and policy execution. Validating Kukah's opinion, Jega and Ibeanu (2007) declared that good governance as a required social and political process revolves around the following components:

- i. Discipline, efficiency and effectiveness in tackling public and private affairs;



- ii. Accountability in the organization cum utilization of resources;
- iii. Responsibility and sensitivity in leadership and in government service;
- iv. Selfless service to the electorate; and;
- v. Empowerment and general participation of the people in the conduct and management of their own affairs.

Therefore, good governance revolves around an effective state that has stable economic and socio-political milieu for efficient distribution of state resources to better the living condition of the citizenry. In the same vein, good governance connotes effective use of the limited resources of the state to improve the living condition of the people.

### **Theoretical Perspective**

Theoretical perspective is imperative while validating the degree of evidence that is to be considered. Given this backdrop, this study is situated within the theory of structural functionalism. The structural functionalism sees society as a multidimensional entity whose units work in synergy to promote solidarity, stability and cohesion. The theory provides a new trend to understanding of political collaboration in the system. Though, the theory is an offshoot of both sociology and anthropology. The key proponents of the theory include Malinowski, Radchiff Brown and Spencer, Durkheim, Comte and Parsons. The theory considers at both social functions that is, outcomes of a social pattern for the operation of social structure and society fairly stable for pattern of social behaviour. It essentially perceives society from the angle of structures and its given responsibilities. The main concern of the advocates is how societies sustain constancy and survive over a given period of time. Their trust is that, societies need to be separated into equal units held together by common symbols and shared values.

The emphasis of the theory is that in the society, political systems can only be efficiently studied and related by understanding the role and functions of various arrangements being carried out by different groups in the systems. That is, in any political system, there are various actors that participate in the political process such as political parties, security, press, bureaucratic organizations and so on, and their roles have effects on each other cum the entire society. In the case of Nigeria, to have free, fair and credible election that will guarantee good governance, the electoral umpire which serves as sub-structure in the Nigerian political system and also given responsibility to manage electioneering process must work in synergy with other structures and sub-structures like political parties, security, mass media, civil society groups (CSG), electoral observers, and as well as other political actors in order to achieve credible elections.

### **3. Methodology**

The work employed secondary data. The data includes major studies that centered on good governance and credible election in Nigeria, relevant internet materials, articles from reputable local and international journals, newspaper publications, textbooks and papers presented in both seminars and conferences.

### **4. Discussion**

#### **Overview of Fourth Republic Nigeria's Electoral System**

The Nigerian fourth republic came to being on May 29, 1999 when Chief Olusegun Obasanjo was elected as democratically President of the country. The emergence of Chief Obasanjo brought the country back to the association of democratic nations in the world. The elections that ushered in the new government were held on 27 February 1999. It was the first elections since the 1993 after military coup of General Sanni Abacha, and it happens to be the first



elections of the Nigerian fourth republic. Consequently, the 1999 elections were not conducted devoid of manipulations, voters' intimidation, rigging and malpractices associated with the previous elections, the election was characterized by all manners of irregularities. Validating the above assertion, Zakariyau (2018) declared that 1999 elections could be related to the observation of Joseph Stalin, a former Soviet Union leader, who maintained that "those who cast the votes decide nothing, but those who count the votes decide everything" Zakariyau further described the political phenomenon that gave birth to Chief Obasanjo as a president in 1999 as nothing other than a civil coup where by the political Mafia in Nigerian political system conducted to guarantee continuity of oppression and ruling in proxy under the disguise of democracy.

According to Uche (2003) the processes that gave birth to the fourth republic was the shortest ever since Nigeria's military-civilian powers transfer. Meanwhile, the 1999 elections have the same characteristics with that of the 1979 general elections given violence, voters' apathy and every other form of misconducts that ensued during the election. The parties that participated in the election were Alliance for Democracy (AD), All Peoples Party (APP) and People Democratic Party (PDP) respectively. However, despite the registration of three political parties, there were two main candidates of the presidential election, Chief Olu Falae of AD/APP alliance and retired military General, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo of the PDP. Both the candidates are from the southern extraction of Nigeria practicing the same faith and that explained the drastic reduction in ethnic and religious politics often associated with Nigeria's electioneering politics. In the same token, there was another general election in 2003 which was midwived by civilian administration of Chief Obasanjo. The election was an opportunity for civilian administration to organize election in order

to ensure seamless transfer of power from one civilian government to another after 1983 controversial elections that led to total breakdown of law and order in the country. The 2003 election was contested by twenty-nine (29) political parties, having a slight different from that of 1999. However, the 2003 general elections witnessed another monumental electoral fraud, just like 1964, 1965, 1983 cum 1999 elections. As observed by Orji (2021) that the 2003 general elections took another dimension of fraud that is known with elections in Nigeria. The political actors that took part in the elections did not bother about the good feelings of the Nigerian voters to rig the elections in a civilized manner. In giving votes to their parties, the numbers increased to the extent it surpassed the number of accredited voters in the elections. In similar vein, Ibeanu (2003) as cited in Orji (2021) described the election as uncivilized accumulation of votes. That under barbaric accumulation of votes, that politicians always attempt to win elections through structural violence without regard for law.

Also, there was another general election on the 14<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> April 2007 for National Assembly, Presidential, Houses of Assembly and Governorship in Nigeria. In the election, forty-three (43) political parties tool part in the governorship election while twenty-four (24) political parties fielded candidates for presidential election across the country. However, it was presumed in some quarters that the country had reached the peak of electoral irregularity in 2003; unfortunately, the subsequent elections confirmed otherwise. As the level of electoral fraud that characterized the 2007 election was beyond human imagination. Towards the general elections of 2007, the then president, Chief Obasanjo made an outrageous comment that the general election would be "a do or die affair" and undeniably it was manifested in campaigning processes. The 2007 election was the election that brought in late



Umaru Yar'adua of People Democratic Party (PDP) to power. The attestation of electoral fraud in that election reflected across all the stages of electoral processes. Meanwhile, the monumental fraud vis-à-vis criminalities committed during the election was condemned in totality by both local and foreign observers.

Consequently, there was some level of improvements in the subsequent elections as opposed to horrible situation of the previous elections, 1999, 2003 and 2007 respectively. Goodluck Jonathan of PDP emerged the winner of the election. There was more than 50 percent reduction in election tribunals' cases compared to 2007 where tribunal was flooded with election cases, and it was a testament to the significant improvement in 2011 elections. There was a great departure between general elections of 2015 and the previous elections especially in Nigeria's fourth republic. Since the return to democratic rule in 1999 in Nigeria, all elections conducted have been characterized by massive fraud, ethnic-religious crisis and other irregularities except of that of 2015 that was adjudged to a large extent to be free, fair and transparent. General Muhammadu Buhari the candidate of All Progressive Congress (APC) was declared as the winner of the elections and he was sworn in on 29 May 2015. As observed by Odeyemi (2015), that 2015 election was a milestone compared with other elections in Nigeria. Though, at the eve of the election there were palpable tensions everywhere in the country because of tense political climate cum primordial sentiment that played out in the country at that time. According to Odeyemi (2015) and Orji (2015) 2015 election was the first election in the history Nigeria where the opposition party defeated the government in power.

The 2019 election was contested between the incumbent President, Muhammadu Buhari and other seventy-three (73) contenders. However, the major contender against the incumbent president was Alhaji

Atiku Abubakar of People Democratic Party. Meanwhile, President Muhammed Buhari was re-elected having polled the highest number of votes out of the total votes cast in the election. According to Sule et al (2020), the 2019 elections came with its own electoral misconducts as there were accusations of ballot stuffing, violence and voters' intimidation in some parts of the country. There were also claims of fraud in the collation of results during the election. The 2023 election was conducted on 25 February 2023 to elect the president, Vice president and other members of National Assembly as the incumbent President tenure ended on 29 May 2023 and could not be re-elected for the third term, based on the constitution of the country. According to Jimoh (2022), the 2023 election was seen as the tightest election since the country returned to civilian rule in 1999. The 2023 election was contested among eighteen (18) contenders, out of these candidates, three (3) candidates were major runners in the race, namely, Bola Ahmed Tinubu of All Progressive Party, Atiku Abubakar of People Democratic Party and Peter Obi of Labour Party. However, after the keenly contested election, Bola Ahmed Tinubu of All Progressive Party was announced the winner having scored the highest number of the total votes cast. However, the 2023 election was not different from the previous elections as there were accusations and counter accusations of electoral misconducts ranging from violence, intimidation, ballot stuffing in some parts of country and inability of electoral umpire to conduct the election based on the electoral act of 2022 among others.

#### **Good Governance and Credible Elections: The Nexus**

The election that is termed credible does not only symbolize acceptability of the political leadership, it is also germane to the preservation of democratic ethos. It gives legitimacy on elected representatives and it serves as a gauge for evaluating the bond between the governments and the governed.



Via the instrument of acceptable elections, electorate take part efficiently in the decision-making process and making sure that leaderships stay in power in as much they enjoy the support of the people and carry out their constitutional duties. In essence, popular democracy and periodic accountability, which are the basis of acceptable and credible elections, are central to development and good governance. As rightly observed by Animashaun (2010), that in any democratic setting, credible election plays different roles. It is a platform through which the electorates demand for stewardship and accountability from their elected representatives; it enables voters to make good choices; it aids political recruitment and moral right on the part of political leaders. The phenomenon of good governance rest largely on the credibility of elections conducted as well as electoral management put in place.

Again, the general participation of citizens' in governance, transparent and accountable authority vis-à-vis efficient utilization of public resources promotes credible election. Hence, the nexus between credible elections and good governance can be deduced on the ground that development rests on the good governance and accountability which is largely based on the extent to which electorates are able to vote their leadership in or out in highly competitive elections.

### **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

This paper examines the intercourse between credible elections and good governance in Nigeria. It analysed the study by situating the theoretical framework of credible elections within the theory of structural functionalism. The paper x-rayed an overview of the electoral process of the Nigeria's fourth republic. It was observed in the study that since the country returned to democratic rule, known as fourth republic that the country had organized seven (7) general elections that is between 1999 and

2023. Based on the foregoing discussion, apart from the 2015 election that seems to be free, fair and credible, other elections conducted between 1999 and 2023 were all marred by electoral irregularities and misconducts. And it is confirming that the only road to good governance revolves around credible election and credibility of electoral system as well as election, is a pointer to the workability of the entire system. In view of this, the paper recommends the following:

For election to be credible there is need for explicit and unambiguous constitutional as well as legal framework that would improve the independence and efficiency of electoral body in Nigeria. Indeed, this legal and constitutional framework would be geared towards safeguarding social justice for the citizenry, who see a credible election as the most powerful yardstick for good governance.

Secondly, to have credible elections that would guarantee good governance in Nigeria entails bringing in strong institutional capacity of the electoral umpire, holistic and broad-based electoral framework cum controlling the level of violence via a framework that would provide task to every stakeholder with drastic punishment for failure.

In the same token, the responsibilities of organizing credible elections is not the sole responsibility of the election umpire, other institutions such as security agencies, civil society groups (CSG), election observers and some other stakeholders are required in attainment of credible elections. Afterward, collaborative roles among various institutions are required towards enhancing a stable political system and credible elections in Nigeria.

Furthermore, the appointments chairman of electoral body, electoral commissioners, and resident electoral as well as administrative secretary should be based on independent process rather the prerogative power of the President. This will go a long



way in enhancing the credibility of elections in Nigeria.

Lastly, acceptable election also requires effective technology and utilization of ICT at all levels of the electoral process ranging from verifying and confirming equipment before supply and deployment, computer training for staffers, recording of all collation centres, computer-based transmission of election results and publicize of election results on the Commission's website.

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